

CHAPTER 14

CRITICISM

THE Civil Service has always been a butt for criticism. It has come in the main either from ill-informed members of the public who have come to regard every form issuing from a government department as a personal insult, or from the representatives of vested interests seeking a screen for their own anti-social conduct together with their gullible supporters.

For some curious and unfathomable reason, the mass of the British people have until recently allowed themselves to be persuaded that the machinery of the state is an unnecessary extravagance kept in being by a self-elected class of Tweedledums and Tweedledees who enjoy a parasitic existence at the expense of the British taxpayer.

This is part of the technique adopted by that irrepressible individualist, Sir Ernest Benn, in his almost daily attempts to discredit the Civil Service. To-day he has many imitators and it will be as well to examine closely some of the things they are saying. Here are some specimens:

“Ministers and Parliament have now ceased to function as the Reform Act intended, and have degenerated into mere advertising agents and registering offices for the schemes of the new governing class still strangely called the Civil Service.”

Again:

“The People . . . having insisted on governing everything, will awaken to discover that they are governed *in* everything by a new class which, because it is and must be apart from the People and above them, carries on the business of Government for the mere sake of governing and incidentally and naturally for its own benefit.”¹

Note this insidious suggestion that the Civil Service is apart

¹ Sir Ernest Benn, *Modern Government*.

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from and above the people. It has a strangely familiar ring. Surely these are more or less the terms used by Lenin in his description and interpretation of the monopoly-capitalist state apparatus. Is this the devil quoting scripture? Is Sir Ernest Benn agreeing with the writer of this book that under a dispensation which functions not on behalf of the whole people but only on behalf of a privileged minority the state itself must in the long run act as the protector and ally of that minority? Surely not; for as President of the Society of Individualists he is very closely associated with that selfsame privileged minority.

All the big combines, whose solicitude for the small man has been demonstrated by casting him for the role of “the lady of Riga”, have supported his programme and they and he have sworn to fight “the collapse and calamity which lurk in the wake of collectivism”. What does Sir Ernest mean then when he criticizes the Civil Service for placing itself “above and apart from the People”? Does he want it to be so near to the people as to be indistinguishable from them—as near as the rank-and-file workers in the Assistance Board, Ministry of Labour, Revenue and other departments of state are getting as a result of new social legislation? I doubt it. Who are these “People” then who are being “governed by the Civil Service”? Are they the millions who pin their faith in Scott, Barlow, Uthwatt and Beveridge as the basic structure of a better post-war Britain? Are these the “People” who are enduring sleepless nights at the thought of the increased numbers of civil servants who may be required to administer these and other plans for social reconstruction? Again, I doubt it. Or when Sir Ernest Benn speaks of “the People” is he thinking of the privileged minority after all—the 120 industrialists who signed a manifesto urging the removal of controls after the war; the insurance companies who would destroy Beveridge if they could; the speculative builders who see in Barlow and Uthwatt the end of their hopes of a post-war exploitation of the housing needs of the people.

If *these* are “the People” it can safely be said that the old Civil Service has never been very far away from *them*. It has

been kept on far too short a lead ever to follow its own devices in the way Sir Ernest suggests. It will indeed become even more closely identified with those who at present "control the machinery of production", unless the profit motive is very radically reduced in importance. That sort of identification would be just another variation on the fascist theme, and if that is not what Sir Ernest Benn wants he must say goodbye to his nineteenth-century individualism and prepare to see an increase rather than a decrease in the size of the Civil Service. That will be a development which need in no way dismay "the People" because there is no reason why it should not be at the same time a Civil Service shorn of the bureaucratic tendencies for which its present attachment to "the system" is largely responsible. But it will certainly dismay Sir Ernest because he believes that "the battle of the haves and the have-nots will proceed throughout the ages and the next phase may be a battle between those who as producers keep the country going, and those who as officials succeed in securing most of the sweets".

It may bring equal dismay to Sir George Nelson, President of the Federation of British Industries, who is quoted as saying that "nationalization would mean the gearing of industry to the State machine and that its speed would be that of the slowest unit" . . . and that "State control does not have to pass efficiency tests, it survives in spite of itself and at the expense of the community".

This is not the place to argue the merits or demerits of nationalization, but an irresponsible statement of this kind does provide the opportunity to point to the achievements of the Ministry of Munitions in the last war and the Ministry of Food in this. As for efficiency, the record of private enterprise in this country during the last twenty-five years is not one which need give rise to an inferiority complex on the part of the Civil Service. The fact of the matter is, that almost the whole of the criticisms coming from this quarter are directed against defects which could never hope to survive the reconstruction of the Service in order to ensure its use by the people for the people. Dr. Herman Finer, whose knowledge of the Service is unrivalled, goes to the root of the matter when he points out

that "much of the abuse of the Civil Service is due to the ferocious antagonism to State interference with industry".¹ A socialized state is, he suggests, inevitably a Civil Service state, and he looks no further than this for a reason to explain the bitter hostility towards the Service on the part of those who see the reins of government slipping from their grasp.

Another critic from the camp of the individualists is Capt. Gammans, M.P. for Hornsey, who in a reply to Professor Laski, printed in the *Evening Standard*, expressed doubt as to the wisdom of nationalizing the mines because he was not convinced that the state was an ideal employer. He referred to the low-paid postal worker and the unskilled grades in the royal dockyards in support of this priceless piece of prescience. He should tell that not to the marines but to the unions which have been fighting for years to improve the conditions of these classes of civil servants, while the individualists and anti-planners have resisted every insignificant rise in the cost of the public services. The Civil Service needs no telling that it is underpaid, but Capt. Gammans and his friends cannot have it both ways. They are not entitled to regard Civil Servants as pampered parasites enriching themselves at the expense of the people and at the same time to accuse the state of being anything but an ideal employer.

The same gentleman asks whether, given a state-controlled coal industry the miners will still retain the right to strike—to which of course there can be only one reply, which is—that given the right kind of state, serving (forgive the wearisome reiteration) "all the people", will they want to—and on whose side will Capt. Gammans be if they do?

There is of course another kind of criticism which is genuine and sincere if not always helpful or well-informed. For reasons which we hope are now becoming obvious, the Civil Service cannot be as efficient as the majority of its individual members of whatsoever class or grade would wish it to be. It is an institution operating within a system and developing with it. It has evolved its own special customs and codes, of course, but nevertheless it functions within limits imposed by a

¹ Dr. Herman Finer, *The British Civil Service*.

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society which is itself in process of change and decay. It can to some extent help or hinder that process but it can in no sense contract out of it. It can be reformed and reconstructed, of course, just as any other part of the system can be reformed and every reform can be made a part of the evolutionary process, but its major defects will never be eradicated until it becomes a real service of the people. We must bear these things in mind when we come to examine the sort of criticisms made by J. P. W. Mallalieu, in his recent book on the Service, *Passed to You, Please*. In this case the criticisms are genuine and the general conclusions sound. The picture is, however, overdrawn and the changes for the better which are already coming about are not sufficiently emphasized. Perhaps it requires a civil servant to do justice to that aspect. Far too many criticisms of the Service have been made by those who have studied it only from the public side of the counter. Take for instance this difficult question of forms. In their ever increasing numbers and complexity no one would seek to defend them all. A lot could be done to effect both reduction and simplification given a greater measure of co-ordination. When for instance the whole of the social services are combined under one Ministry of Social Security there can be also a single form to serve a combination of purposes. The unintelligibility of many of the forms in use throughout the Service is nevertheless inexcusable. In many cases they are the creation of minds incapable of seeing the end results which the form is designed to achieve, or the point of view of the people who are required to complete them. Minds incapable too of translating the wording of acts and statutory rules and orders into simple everyday language. Addressing themselves to millions of people at different levels of intelligence they attempt to express meanings in terms of formal logic with all the humanity left out.

This is a true bill and it would be absurd to defend it, but there are nevertheless extenuating circumstances. Take for instance the forms used by the income-tax authorities than which none surely could be less popular. Some part of their seeming complexity is undoubtedly due to the archaic traditions

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to which the work of assessing and collecting income tax has been until recently required to conform. When not so very long ago attempts were made to introduce legislation with a view to freeing our fiscal system from those ancient trammels, it was not the civil servants but the landed vested interests which rallied round and caused the House of Lords to veto the Revenue Bill.

The war is making a bonfire of a lot of that vestigial rubbish and a note of greater simplicity is already being observed as a consequence. But the taxation system of this country is still based on a method of personal allowances to enable it, according to the authorities, to conform to principles of equity as between one taxpayer and another. Those allowances, both as to their amount and the conditions in which they can be given, are rooted in a social system based upon dependence and a whole network of relationships. How can it be easy then to devise forms which will bring out the essential facts with regard to those relationships in order to convert them into a relief for a housekeeper, a dependent relative or an adopted child, to take only three of many? Again, given a system which compels people to a grudging and unlovely thrift and therefore to an investment in a hundred and one different types of life assurance, etc., how can you hope to effect complete simplicity where the forms for recording this and other information are concerned? If you then go on to encourage people to buy their own houses and to mortgage them, or to invest if they can afford it in stocks and shares, how again do you hope to discover the true position of twelve million people in terms of taxable income without asking a lot of seemingly irrelevant questions? Don't blame the Civil Service for that. You can never hope to simplify some of the forms sent out by government departments until you have simplified the economic system which creates the need for them. Examine the forms in common use throughout the Service and you will find that the greater number are necessary only because the prevailing motives in our unplanned society are greed, fear and mutual distrust.

Take again the circumlocution and adherence to routine,

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instances of which crowd Mallalieu's book. Much of this has been inculcated in the Service by the "fetch and carry" role normally assigned to it. If civil servants could feel that their function and purpose were harmonious with the real needs of the people, and if as well they were not at all times subject to irresponsible and damaging criticism they would tend to develop a greater sense of proportion and a good deal more imagination. Already the exigencies of the war situation are curing a lot of bad habits. Relaxation of hitherto sacrosanct methods of procedure are the order of the day and there are thousands of responsible civil servants with thirty or forty years of tradition behind them beginning to find exceeding merit in the simpler solutions of today.

The same reply could be made to the charge so often levelled against the Service that it prefers to follow precedent rather than assume responsibility for decisions based upon the facts of a particular case. That is one of the usual half truths from which the public service has suffered from time immemorial. Routine and precedent have their necessary place in every scheme of organization and you cannot run a government department charged with the responsibility of reducing complicated legislation to detailed instructions for application to millions of individual cases without them. If they are followed blindly and without regard to changed circumstances, they undoubtedly lead to the bureaucratic attitude of mind which every intelligent civil servant strives always to avoid. In many departments today, particularly those which make direct contact with the public, there is a tremendous amount of delegated responsibility to officers of almost every grade for the settlement of cases without reference to a higher authority. Large areas of the clerical staff are taking over more or less executive functions for the duration and wartime 'relaxations' have brought a great increase in personal initiative.

These criticisms link up with another which accuses the Civil Service of being too remote from the world of business—too blind to the ways of the great 'outside'.

Well, you cannot have it both ways. If you choose to treat the Civil Service as a vocation you cannot expect its votaries

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to go out into the market-place. If you hedge the civil servant round with all sorts of restrictions upon his political liberty you can hardly expect him to be up to the minute in his knowledge of commercial practice and the economics of capitalism. But here again there is a lot of progress to record. The income-tax official is himself a taxpayer. The people employed in the local offices of the Ministry of Food know all about rationing from the public angle. An Assistance Board official dealing with a war damage claim may himself have been blitzed the night before. The public counter is not quite the barrier to mutual understanding that it used to be. On both sides of it there are fellow citizens who have a mutual interest in the better planning of our national resources and the more enlightened administration necessary to convert principles into practice.

A partial answer to all these criticisms is supplied by Professor Laski in his foreword to Mr. Mallalieu's book when he says that "the traditional qualities of the Civil Service arise out of the function it is called upon to fulfil in a *laissez-faire* society". He agrees that so far as the administrative class is concerned it has a number of virtues, among them "tact, competence and a real zest for administrative perfection". On the debit side, however, he places "absence of imagination, audacity and an unwillingness to experiment". He accuses it of avoiding actions which may offend powerful interests and thinks that "innovation, frankness and adaptation are not parts of its genius". These are major criticisms and one can only express the hope that they lead Professor Laski to the inescapable conclusions which this book is attempting to draw.

Actually, of course, as we have seen, there has never been any such thing as a completely *laissez-faire* society. Even in the heyday of free competition, as we have seen, there was a measure of state interference. Its form has varied from time to time but its fundamental purpose, to protect private enterprise very often against itself, has never changed.

If the anti-planners have their way, its form will again change. Monopoly would then demand of the state what the German industrialists demanded of Hitler—a free hand within

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its own spheres of exploitation and the repression of trade-union and working-class organization. In a later chapter we shall see what that would mean for the Civil Service. Meanwhile it is vitally important that criticism should be constructive. The more enlightened and forward-looking the government which has to handle the problems of peace, the more it will need to rely upon a highly trained, well educated (in the best sense) and politically conscious body of disinterested civil servants.

If the general public can be persuaded to grasp that fundamental principle now it will look with sympathy at every attempt on the part of the Service to change its own nature. The Civil Service will do that as easily as any other body of workers under the impact of social and environmental change. To quote Professor MacMurray: "Negative government creates a negative Civil Service. Positive democracy needs a positive Civil Service which is with the people wholeheartedly and eagerly in its struggle for a fuller human life."¹

That is a view to which the larger part of the Civil Service itself will say a fervent amen.

¹ Professor John MacMurray, *Constructive Democracy*.

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CHAPTER 15

THE SERVICE IN WAR-TIME

DURING the war of 1914-18 we saw in this country a rapid expansion of the state apparatus due in the main to the controls inseparable from a war economy.

The Board of Trade for instance, acting through a Railway Executive Committee, took charge of the railways, and agriculture was to a large extent controlled jointly by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Food Department.

The Ministry of Munitions established control over 130 national factories. "It did more for the advance of British industry in three years than had been accomplished by private enterprise in the previous twenty."¹ The Ministry of Shipping organized the import trade of the country in relation to available shipping, and the Ministry of Food was responsible for the bulk supply of commodities in addition to exercising a control over prices and taking over functions hitherto performed by the countless numbers of pre-war parasites who operated between the producer and consumer. No one can read the history of that period without arriving at the conclusion that without this high degree of centralized planning and control the war would never have been won. The position with regard to shipping was for instance in complete chaos until the government, reluctantly at first, stepped in and adopted every conceivable device to make a little go a long way and gradually to increase available tonnage to meet transport needs in some order of priority. This immense task of organization was carried out by civil servants, and it was said that if the war had continued the whole of the transport and organization necessary to supply not only the armed forces but the civilian community with essential commodities would have been in the hands of Whitehall. When the end of the war came we know of course what happened. The controls

¹ L. Chiozza Money, *The Triumph of Nationalisation*.

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were removed with almost indecent haste and everything was handed back to private enterprise with results which furnished some of the factors leading up to September, 1939.

And now once again the state apparatus is expanding to meet the needs of a war economy. This time the controls are even more extensive and complicated.

A comparison between them and the controls of 1914-18 would be a profitable subject for study. Here it is only possible to draw attention to the greater identification of big business with the machinery in operation today as giving a clue to the attitude which certain sections of monopoly capitalism are likely to adopt towards the post-war Civil Service. It is more than likely that the more astute captains of industry will raise no objection to the retention of certain selected controls on conditions which they themselves will lay down. This is a move for which the way has already been prepared by the introduction of their own nominees into key positions within the controlling departments. Meanwhile the Civil Service is shouldering an enormous burden of responsibility, and when the history of its war-time function comes to be written we shall probably find that it has wrought even more prodigiously than it did during the last war. This it could not have done without some modification of its own structure and conventions. Conditions of service have been drastically revised. The seven-hour day for instance has gone the same way as the four or six weeks annual leave. Many civil servants have been working to a fifty-one-hour week for years and leave for everyone irrespective of grade has been levelled down to a uniform sixteen days. The effect on health is already becoming marked and Sir Henry Bashford, late Chief Medical Officer to the Post Office, recently remarked on the possibly harmful results of longer hours combined with unavoidable monotony.

In the Civil Service, as in industry, the discovery is slowly being made that efficiency of production and quantity of output do not necessarily follow from an overlong working week and the principle of more frequent rest periods is generally conceded.

The supervisory factor is a big problem in this connection.

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In a multi-tiered organization like the British Civil Service there is always this business of big fleas and little fleas, and under the old dispensation the supervisory misfit with no psychological equipment could do a lot of harm, particularly in circumstances where the efficient administration and organization of processes was considered more important than the social results for which the processes were designed. As the civil servant has drawn closer to his public, however, and the need for speedy results has become more urgent, there has been a greater tendency as we have seen to delegate responsibility. Large-scale operations such as those performed in the Revenue and other departments are not doing away with the need for supervision but they are spreading it over a wider area and changing it in character. There is more real organization and fewer pinpricks. A lot more is left to individual initiative and "Passed to you, please" is no longer the slogan under which the Service, as a whole, operates. There are still a number of supervisory officers who cannot be prised away from the old regime, but with the staffs taking an increasing share of responsibility, through Whitley, for the smooth running of departments, they are fighting a losing battle. The Inland Revenue Staff Federation for instance is organized as a basis of office units and there is a wholesome and growing tendency for these local committees to be used as a clearing-house for staffing problems and the avoidance of friction in the organization of the work of the office.

Evacuation has had a further modifying influence on Civil Service conditions and practice.

The move whereby thousands of civil servants were taken from Whitehall and deposited in remote seaside resorts was made not in their interests but in those of the public service and for the greater safety of its records. Its effects on the staff have been devastating. The choice of the more popular resorts (the only one possible in the circumstances) has raised a billeting problem which so far as the billetee is concerned has only been solved by shutting a blind eye to deficiencies and turning a deaf ear to the plaint of landladies who resent an invasion which brings very little grist to their mill. A lot of the

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earlier bitterness has been lived down but the Civil Service evacuee is still, to a large extent, unwanted. The government has hesitated to declare the Blackpools and the rest of them out of bounds to visitors for the duration, and as war workers are not taking its 'holidays at home' policy very seriously the position during 'the season' is not a satisfactory one either for visitors, landladies or evacuees. In one area the lack of transport facilities to enable civil servants to get to and from work at times which clashed with the visitors' similar attempts to get to and from the beach produced a sit-down strike on the part of the former and a hold-up of the tramway system for over an hour. Apart from living conditions, the official environment in these areas is unbelievably crude. Enough has been said earlier to illustrate the deplorably low standards of accommodation and equipment prevailing in most government offices even in normal times. But if the general public knew the conditions in which important official business is transacted in the once resplendent Grand Hotels, Metropoles and Hydros of our favourite resorts, they would marvel at the comparative efficiency attained. Much of the equipment would commend itself to the Heath Robinson school of improvisation, and comfort and convenience have no place in the life of the evacuated civil servant. Another problem which besets the Service to-day is the influx of tens of thousands of 'temporaries'. This is a phenomenon with which the last war made us familiar, but it is encountered now on a much larger scale. In the Postal and Telegraph Censorship Branch of the Ministry of Information for example, out of a total staff in the neighbourhood of 10,000, only a few hundreds are established. Most of the scientific personnel of the Service is employed in a temporary capacity and the problem of determining conditions for them has provided a headache both for establishment officers and the staff unions which look after their interests.

In every department expansion of function and the depletion of experienced staff as a result of call-up has led to the employment of every type of temporary labour from the boy or girl from school to the housewife straight from suburbia

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with a husband usually in the forces. Much of this staff has had to be trained from scratch to the performance of duties which in peace-time no officer would have been required to tackle until a fairly lengthy probation had been served. The results have been unusually good, but could never have been achieved except by the sacrifice of the meticulousness and close observance of official instructions which slowed down the pace of every departmental operation before the war. The 'temporary' invasion has had another good result. It has humanized the Service and made it still more difficult for interested people to speak with awe and bated breath about its vocational character. Thousands of men and women are going back to their normal peace-time jobs with a knowledge of the inner workings of the state apparatus. They will have no illusions with regard to the oracular nature of its pronouncements but they will know something of its difficulties and problems and will be helpful allies in effecting its democratization. They will form in fact another bridge between the Civil Service and the people. Incidentally they will, of course, present a big problem for solution as part of the major task of post-war reconstruction. Some of the married women will want to get back to husbands and families. There will be others, however, who, having tasted economic independence, will want to retain it. They will make common cause with established women civil servants for the abolition of the marriage bar and there will be an early test of the government's already declared intention of finding work for all. If married women are excluded from the scope of that declaration many of them will want to know why. Questions on this and kindred matters were put by the hundred to the government's spokesmen at the Women's Conference convened by the War Cabinet not very long ago, but there is as yet we believe no hint of a reply.¹

As for the male temporaries, many of them occupying

¹ As this book goes to print some of the replies have come to hand. On all women's questions, they make it clear that the government will offer no guarantee of the continued employment of married women in the Civil Service, and that its attitude towards equal pay remains unchanged.

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professional and technical posts, their future is uncertain. It will be determined largely by the alternative possibilities of expansion or contraction in the immediate post-war period.

Some departments like the Ministry of Information will presumably close down soon after the cessation of hostilities. That in itself will throw some thousands of technicians on to the labour market. Others like Supply, Aircraft Production and of course, the War Departments, will probably survive the end of the war by a considerable period. A lot will depend on the arrangements for demobilization and the rate of changeover to peace-time production—Mr. Churchill is already talking of conscription as a permanent feature of our social life and the need to maintain a high degree of preparedness for, presumably, the next war. Yet other war-time departments, such as Food, will have an indefinitely extended lease of life. Given a continuation of rationing which most people are coming to accept as inevitable and part at least of the task of feeding a starving Europe, then the Ministry of Food is going to have its work cut out for years to come. The rest is conjecture. Expansion in certain circumstances—contraction in others. The politics of the later stages of the war itself will decide the size and character of the post-war Civil Service.

CHAPTER 16

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MONOPOLY capitalism we have said creates the precise form of state machinery necessary for its purpose. What happens, however, when that system issues in its most advanced form? When no longer able to maintain its class position by the methods of parliamentary democracy, it is forced to dispense with the normal constitutional procedures which serve it in its heyday and to use the methods with which fascist Italy and Nazi Germany have made us familiar. To put it shortly, how does the Civil Service fare under fascism? Let us take Italy before its defeat as our first example. To begin with we shall recall that the policy of state intervention in the economic life of any country is not a peculiar characteristic of a particular form of government. *Laissez-faire* has, in short, never been amongst the capitalist absolutes. We should expect to find therefore that long before the rise of Mussolini, Italy had been subjected to all sorts of controls. Acquaintance with the condition of the Italian proletariat and peasantry convinces us that those controls were exercised on behalf of Italian big business. The arrival of fascism was, as we know, heralded by the usual promises to every class, including the omnipresent 'little man', but in the result, as we also know, the position of the monopolists was in no degree worsened by the change of regime. The fascist Charter of Labour laid down the principle that state intervention, in the event of private initiative failing, should assume the form of encouragement, supervision or direct control but it also went on to suggest that private enterprise was the best way of furthering the interests of the nation.

The practical application of that principle carried out without parliamentary checks meant, in effect, that the state through its Civil Service could always be bribed to come to the assistance of bankrupt concerns or industries and by subsidy

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and a measure of control over conditions of labour, restore its profit-making capacity. Here you have the deterioration of the Civil Service and a return to the jobbery and racketeering normally associated with the pre-capitalist phase of the development of the state apparatus. We find again that in 1926 the industrialists sought successfully to bring about a revaluation of the lira and to underpin it by reducing the cost of the Civil Service, a step which impoverished the lower and intermediate grades but left the administrative class untouched. The creation of the much boosted corporations provided another illustration of the close intimacy between the fascist state and private enterprise. In theory they were designed to curb the tendencies of some of the larger monopolies and to bring all the interests involved in commodity production under the aegis of the state. The big business answer to this was to demand and secure the assistance of the state in the creation of compulsory trusts. In theory the trusts were subject to supervision but this was never imposed and as we know the fascist corporations themselves were merely a façade under cover of which monopoly capitalism continued to flourish at the expense of the people.

Turning to Nazi Germany, we find a similar position. "Not only have the fundamentals of capitalist economy not been disturbed but none of its organizational forms have been seriously altered—all big combines, industry and trade continue to function as before."¹

Industrial power in Germany we have long since discovered, and in spite of the lavish promises to the small man, is more highly centralized than ever. In this process the state has assisted by the complete elimination of the trade unions and other checks on capitalist exploitation.

German capitalism, as we know, has paid a price for this state patronage and protection, but it has returned a heavy dividend. Under the Nazi code the appointed "Leaders" of industry are themselves the nominees of the industrialists, something which should give us seriously to think when we come to consider that in this country at the present moment

¹ R. W. Brady, *Spirit and Structure of German Fascism*.

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there are more than sixty former directors or employees of Imperial Chemicals Ltd. occupying important positions in our own Ministry of Supply. We know how in Germany, too, the control of labour is exercised through the German Labour Front, which supplies all capitalism's needs in the direction of docile and submissive manpower. The civil servant in Germany is forced to belong to the Nazi Party. Deprivation of civil liberty has there reached its logical conclusion. The Nazi Party leadership is itself hand in glove with the industrialists and under the Nazi system, therefore, the Civil Service is tied hand and foot to the capitalist system from which Hitler swore to deliver the German people.

Thus we see the differing degrees of identification between the state and monopoly capitalism in the rake's progress of the latter towards the fascism which produces its final contradictions. We see also the degradation which befalls a civil service which is forced to come to heel at the bidding of those who hold the reins of power. The big industrialists in this country would have us to believe that the retention of controls after the war and the maintenance of what they would describe as the stranglehold of the Civil Service would deprive us of *our* hard-won freedoms and sometimes they point to the fascist countries for confirmation. On analysis, however, we find that in those countries the operations of monopoly capitalism are in no way hindered by the shadowy controls exercised by the fascist state. *We know, therefore, that what really matters is the power behind the controls.* Under any system based on private enterprise, whether its form be parliamentary, democratic or totalitarian, the real rulers, i.e. the capitalists, can always say with much greater justification than Louis XIV, "l'état c'est moi".

President Roosevelt, himself an opponent of what he described as economic centralism, appointed a committee in 1938 to examine and report upon "a growing concentration of private power without equal in history", something which he regarded as "seriously impairing the economic effectiveness of private enterprise as a way of providing employment for labour and capital". The committee itself in the introduction

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to its report, while condemning a system of unregulated monopoly capitalism, urged the people of the United States not to lose sight of the basic philosophy of American economy, defined as "a competitive system of private capitalism". When, however, it came to report it seems to have become convinced that the big corporations and monopolies had come to stay and that it would be impossible to do more than ensure that they operated in the general welfare. In coming to that conclusion it had discovered that "the principal instrument of the concentration of economic power has been the corporate charter with unlimited power—charters which afforded a detour around every principle of fiduciary responsibility; charters which permitted promoters and managers to use the property of others for their own enrichment and to the detriment of the real owners; charters which omitted every safeguard of individual and public welfare which commonsense and experience have alike taught are necessary". It is obvious that when the committee reached the stage of producing recommendations to prevent "the uneconomic concentration of economic power in private hands", it was conditioned by the limitations which its terms of reference had imposed upon it. It had been required to produce a formula which, while achieving the aforementioned objectives, nevertheless safeguarded the interests of competitive capitalism. It is hardly any wonder therefore that its practical proposals were limited in character and by no means unanimous. Such proposals, including *inter alia* the better protection of patent rights, limitation of patent monopolies, and the restriction of the exploitation of foreign patents at the expense of American industry, were directed not towards the protection of 'the people as a whole' but of that section of the industrialists which was finding itself squeezed out by the remorseless logic of events and the logical development of monopoly capitalism.

Nevertheless, the committee "thought it had formulated a philosophy which would serve the purpose of strengthening and preserving a free people safe in the operation of free economic institutions." Actually it had been given an impossible task to perform, one by comparison with which

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that of King Canute was child's play. For in this case, and what is true of the United States is equally true of this country, there are two approaching tides, one from the monopolists to whom *laissez-faire* is a dead letter and the advance to socialism anathema; the other from the progressive forces which will interpret controls in terms only of social advance.

It is perfectly clear that if the monopoly-capitalist system is to enjoy complete domination in the post-war world it can only do so by assuming a fascist character, in which case the state form and the Civil Service must be adapted, forcibly if necessary, in order to conform with it. All of which is bound to make one apprehensive of the war-time entry into the Civil Service of the nominees of the monopolists, a move which can be seen clearly as an attempt in advance of the actual contingency to shape the Service to its own post-war needs. Here is what one might describe as the fifth column of monopoly capitalism working from within the state structure with a view later to handing it over to those who will adjust its control to the anti-social purposes which are already implicit in the public declarations of the anti-planners.

Something of this danger has been seen, but in the view of the writer, imperfectly understood by Herbert Morrison, who has delivered a number of speeches recently on the dangers of monopolist controls.

In one of them he drew attention to the "partnership between state and industry which under the spur of war re-energized the failing powers of many of our producers and enabled us to win our way back towards that industrial leadership which we were in such danger of losing". In the same speech he reminded his audience that "although a case could be made out for private and public enterprise existing together within appropriate fields, there could be no case whatever for private *unenterprise*, for private ownership and control without the spur either of a free market and free competition or of real social purpose". Where control is necessary it should in Morrison's view be directed towards "the ends of national wellbeing", and for that purpose "the state should be represented by officers specially trained to

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understand and work with industry and to watch the interests of the consumer as a whole". It seems clear from the foregoing that, like President Roosevelt, Morrison also is trying to back the horse both ways. That is the dilemma of all those who pin their faith to revolution by consent. They begin by postulating a system of control directed towards desirable social ends and finish up by perpetuating those which merely guarantee profits and protect shareholders at the expense of the people.

The danger of Morrison's approach (and it is a deadly dangerous one) is that it looks to a form of state bureaucracy rather than to the democratic decentralization of state power as the motive force behind the productive process. If he were not so blindly prejudiced he would know where to turn for the most brilliantly successful experiment in the diffusion of state power the world has ever seen.

It is, indeed, only possible to make the correct deductions with regard to the role of the Civil Service in relation to a developing economic system by surveying the broad field of its operation in the Soviet Union. Comparisons between the Soviet public service and our own are difficult to make and that fact is in itself significant for it arises because of the much wider area of activity over which the Soviet system operates and the mixed nature of the control which it exercises. There is for instance a high degree of municipalization not only of essential services as we understand them here but of such things as housing and public health. The co-operative organizations and trade unions are also sharers with the state itself in the general control of the means of production and distribution, and this makes it a little difficult to discover the precise outlines of what we should call the Soviet Civil Service.

We know, however, that the executive and administrative functions of the state are in the hands of the Council of People's Commissars. We know too that there are commissariats covering every branch of industry, transport, defence, justice, public health, foreign affairs and the rest, some branches on an all-union basis and others delegated to the commissar for each of the eleven autonomous republics

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within the U.S.S.R. These might be said to approximate to our own state departments; but that said, further comparison becomes difficult. In this country for instance social insurance is administered through a number of agencies, but the central responsibility lies with several government departments with, as we have seen, considerably overlapping functions. In the Soviet Union, however, the function of the Civil Service, as we should understand it, in relation to social insurance has been largely handed over to the Central Council of Trade Unions, a body which, in addition, carries out a number of tasks in connection with factory inspection which again in this country would fall within the jurisdiction of the Home Office.

Again, although there is a Commissariat for Defence, its function so far as the organization of civil defence is concerned, is largely in the hands of a body described as the Society for Defence against Aerial and Chemical Warfare. There is in fact a considerable range of differentiation extending from a high degree of centralization to a wide dispersal of responsibility for the organization and administration of certain branches of social and economic activity. Under a system in which expanding production is secured by the elimination of the checks and hindrances of the profit motive, it is possible to introduce innovations and experiments in administration without in any way harming the social and economic fabric. A variety of agents can be brought in as allies and auxiliaries of the central government and in order to widen the sense of public responsibility. They have all to conform to the central plan but within that framework there is considerable scope for initiative on the part of trade unions, co-operatives, collective farms and the hundreds of scientific, cultural and educational organizations which assist in the general process of development. It is this fact which helps more than any other to stifle the bureaucratic tendency at birth.

In this country the gap between the public servant and the public is still wide, though the exigencies of the war and the increasing political and social consciousness of the rank-and-file Civil Service is lessening it. In the Soviet Union the gap is

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narrower to the point of non-existence. Otherwise never for a moment could there have been such perfect co-ordination of the military and civil effort as we have seen in the resistance to fascist aggression which has so amazed the rest of the world. It is a matter for wonderment that with the evidence to the contrary piling up, the stale accusation should still be made that the Russian revolution had only succeeded in creating a new class of 'managers' with special privileges to which the rest of the workers were denied access. A book by James Burnham, called *The Managerial Revolution*, published only recently, repeats this unfounded assertion and seeks to represent the Soviet Union as a sort of Civil Servants' paradise. Actually the capitalist state furnishes far more evidence of bureaucracy. At every turn it is brought up sharp by the four walls of the private profit system which confine it. In attempting to interpret and apply legislation directed towards the maintenance of the economic *status quo* and the preservation of monopoly capitalism as the real power, what else can it do but try to find its way through a host of conflicting instructions and endeavour to apply them by reference to more or less rigid formulas? In the Soviet Union the state is at least on the way to becoming the representative of the whole of society. It is in process of taking possession of the means of production on behalf of "all the people". It has a constitution which provides for a planned economy designed "to increase the *public* wealth and to raise the material and cultural level of the toilers". Its Civil Service therefore need not stand "above and beyond the people". It has no separate interests and there is no capitalist class to insist upon its segregation. It is becoming less and less concerned with "the government of persons" and more and more concerned with "the administration of things".

CHAPTER 17

THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SERVICE

It will be impossible in this chapter to do more than refer briefly to the work of a selected few of the state departments and to give some idea of the way in which that work affects the general life of the community. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries provides an excellent introduction.

Created as a department dealing only with agriculture in 1889 it added a fisheries branch in 1903 and became a ministry in 1919. Before this agriculture had been languishing for a long period and governmental responsibility had been too occasional to effect any marked improvement. When as a result of persistent pressure the Board of Agriculture was at last set up, one of the opponents to the bill spoke of the necessity of bringing back prosperity to agriculture, "not by Act of Parliament or the fostering care of a Department but by bringing home to the farmers and landowners that knowledge and power by which they themselves may work out their own deliverance". This gentleman was apparently one of the pioneers of anti-planning. Nevertheless, something had to be done to counteract the effects of the large-scale importation of wheat from abroad and the exodus of agricultural labour to the towns and the opposition was therefore overcome. The department started modestly by acting mainly as a registering and recording agency in connection with contagious diseases amongst animals, tithes and copyholds, ordnance survey, forestry, botanical gardens, and the muzzling of dogs. One of its earliest duties was to ensure the payment of tithes, an obligation which the occupiers of land were enjoined to accept "as a Christian duty".

More latterly the Ministry has been responsible for the redemption of the tithe rent charge and the keeping of records including title deeds, an examination of which would doubtless

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throw a lot of light on the methods whereby most of the landed estates were originally acquired.

Its functions have been added to enormously within recent years and to-day it is responsible for a large measure of agricultural training and research, livestock improvement (today for instance it is sponsoring investigation into processes of artificial insemination), research into dairy farming and agricultural engineering, the development of small holdings and every branch of horticulture. It employs, apart from the grades common to the rest of the Civil Service, a number of veterinary surgeons, land agents, surveyors, architects, engineers, entomologists, ecologists, zoologists, barristers, botanists, gardeners and agricultural experts—all of them civil servants. It furnishes grants to colleges and institutes not themselves under government control for the furtherance of agricultural research, thus providing yet another example of the use of public funds for the furtherance of private enterprise within a sphere in which, until the beginning of the war, there had been more uneconomic individualism than in any other. Twenty years ago the Ministry authorized the creation of a credit association on co-operative lines for the purpose of making long-term loans to farmers; but this experiment failed because of this same individualism. Its function in connection with fisheries includes deep sea research, co-operation with the navy to provide protection for British fishermen, the cleansing of polluted rivers, and a number of others for which it employs a staff of trained and qualified naturalists and statisticians. It makes itself responsible for recording the size of catches and their value in the various markets, and it endeavours to chart the fluctuations in the movement of fish to assist the industry in determining the manpower necessary to secure maximum results. Now no one can deny that these are important functions from all of which the community should reap some solid benefit, but the position of agriculture and fishing before the war suggests that some at least of these benefits have not accrued. None of the painstaking work of departmental statisticians, for instance, could prevent the economics of scarcity from keeping the fish

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in the sea from the plates of would-be consumers. We have spoken a good deal of the frustration of the civil servant whose disinterested efforts are so often given an anti-social twist by irresponsible interests and here quite clearly is a case in point. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries has placed immense resources at the disposal of two of Britain's foremost and most vital industries. There is no indication that either of them has taken full advantage of these resources in order to produce a maximum yield from land and sea and no artificial restriction of supplies to the consumer. Hence this department, like so many others, loses much of what should be a valuable social crop because it sows in the barren soil of economic individualism. Contrast this with the statistical bureau of the Supreme Council of Public Economy which in the Soviet Union employs thousands of experts and assistants. Here statistics are produced not for their own sake nor to assist private enterprise to maintain its rate of profit, but to record essential data covering every social activity and need and to enable reliable estimates to be made of productive potential for any given area or period.

Pursuing a similar theme let us turn for a moment to a little-known branch of Inland Revenue. The Valuation Office was a creation of Lloyd George during his crusading period in 1909. The taxation of land values was a centre-piece in the general election of that year and the Valuation Office was given the task of giving administrative effect to the legislation which followed. In actual fact and although it was specifically included in the budget, the taxation of land values was never more than a piece of vote-catching window-dressing more or less of a piece with the promises which the Tories are making today to out-Beveridge Beveridge. But the Valuation Office had been created and a role must needs be assigned to it. As it happens, the war of 1914-18 brought about a considerable rise in land values and the work of this hitherto obscure branch began to assume considerable importance. It acted on behalf of other government departments in the purchase or sale of lands, assisted the Ministry of Health with housing schemes, was responsible for the valuation of school sites for the

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Board of Education and the determination of income-tax assessments on certain classes of property. During the slump it carried out certain duties on behalf of the Ministry of Labour in connection with the development of special areas and arterial road schemes. Since the present war began there has been a further extension of its function. In 1939 it took over the whole of the work of assessment under the War Damage Compensation Act until 1942, when part of it was transferred to the War Damage Commission. This is the briefest possible outline of the function of the Valuation Office but it is enough to indicate its intimate connection with some of the most urgent problems associated with the private ownership of land and buildings. It will depend entirely on the fate of the Barlow and Uthwatt reports as parts of the ground plan for a better post-war Britain whether the resources of this branch of the Civil Service are placed at the service of the community as a whole or whether they will be cribbed, cabined and confined by the total lack of planning which disfigured both the town and the country after the last war.

The social significance of income tax will come right home to everyone. This, the largest branch of the Revenue Department, has a closer relationship with the economic system than any of the other departments of state. The frustration suffered by the scientist employed in the National Physical Laboratory is probably no greater than that of the socially conscious income-tax official who in peace-time might have fretted under the knowledge that of every £ of tax assessed or collected by his agency only a small proportion was devoted to social service, and a considerably higher proportion to interest on the National Debt and what he might have regarded as non-productive expenditure. Moreover, before the war he laboured under the additional disadvantage of working to a fiscal code and with machinery which in all essentials had suffered very little modification since it was introduced over a century before. The local income-tax official was tied to a system which forced him to find his way through an intricate maze of legislation and instructions. It required him, long before he got to the stage of determining a liability to tax, to

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decide the far more difficult question of assessability. He had (and still has) to know what constituted income for taxation purposes, and having determined that, to go on to decide upon how much of that income the tax should be levied. We have already pointed out some of the difficulties involved in that seemingly simple process, but even so they are only a small part of the complexity of a taxation system which is bound to take into account the varied nature of income in a competitive society in which there are so many gradations between the very rich and the very poor. Let us not forget that the device of direct taxation represents nothing more than a clumsy attempt to superimpose upon a sharply differentiated and inequalitarian system of rewards a small measure of equity as between one class of taxpayer and another. Just as those who are financially able to invoke the law are in theory entitled to equal justice from it, so there must be a certain equality of treatment of every individual member of the taxpaying public. In both cases however it must leave undisturbed the relative position of the differently remunerated sections of the community—and there of course is the rub. No one having spent a few years on the official side of the counter in a local income-tax office can be left with a shred of illusion as to the insanity of our economic arrangements. To determine the measure of income from an owner-occupied property, or from foreign possessions in a dozen different categories and countries, or from the wartime profits of a business which may range from a local tobacconist to a big monopoly, requires a knowledge of the way in which the system works, which leaves one branch at least of the Civil Service in an excellent position from which to measure its defects. Even within the sphere of salaries and wages the complications are almost as many. The gross remuneration of a taxpayer may include sums ranging between £2 and £2,000 claimed to be expended by him in the pursuit of his calling, and the formula used to test such claims is itself full of pitfalls, even when the actual facts are capable of ascertainment. But all these are only the first hurdles.

The method by which the famous theory of "equality of

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sacrifice" is applied is based upon a system of personal allowances related to the taxpayer's domestic circumstances and the income-tax official has often to make judgments to which official instructions offer very little guide, and to explain and defend which calls for a considerable knowledge of human beings and their reaction to fiscal imposition. Definitions are of more than usual importance where income-tax allowances are concerned. The terms "maintenance", "dependence", "child", "separation", "expenses", "ownership", "occupation", "profit", carry a meaning sometimes quite different from that which common usage has given them. Official definitions are such as to ensure that the granting of an allowance under a particular heading should in general do nothing to impair the social fabric nor must its withdrawal offend a single vested interest. The history of income-tax reliefs is in large measure the history of the slow recognition by the state of social changes which have long since become accepted and assimilated. Any income-tax office could for instance furnish reliable data on such large social questions as the current trend in marital relations, the approach of women towards economic independence, the attitude of employers towards social security, and a dozen other important issues.

The war has, of course, introduced considerable changes in taxation procedure. The addition of eight millions of taxpayers threatened at one time to strain the machinery to breaking point and even to-day there is probably no more hardly pressed department than the Revenue. The calculations of war-damage contribution and post-war credit are war-time additions to its work and "pay as you earn" is confronting it with its biggest problem since income tax in its present form was introduced in the early part of the nineteenth century. Before the advent of this new code, the civil servants employed in tax offices were beginning to break down the suspicion and hostility normally displayed towards them by the great body of taxpayers. By visitation at factories and the establishment of close contact with shop stewards and trade unions they were parting company with the tradition

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of separatism which kept the public at bay. Now "pay as you earn" is completing this process. Many of the workers, who in the long run will benefit by this almost revolutionary innovation, will know that the Revenue workers themselves were the first to advocate it and have taken a large part in overcoming opposition to a scheme of taxation which breaks entirely new fiscal ground.

That there will be still further modifications of the code is certain. Complete simplification however can follow only in the wake of economic and social change. At present there are too many vested interests in the retention of taxation in its present form. The accountancy profession, the building societies, the insurance companies, have all an axe to grind and inside the department there are still a few anachronisms and nineteenth-century encrustations to get rid of before the taxation system of this country can be brought into line with twentieth-century needs.

It is doubtful if any part of the state apparatus has been brought so closely in touch with the war effort as the Ministry of Labour, nor one whose function ever since it was created in 1916 has been so reflective of the later stages of a monopoly capitalist system tinged as it has been with social reformism. The story begins in 1909 with the passing of the Labour Exchanges Act of that year. The exchanges were to provide a medium whereby employers needing labour could be put in touch with workers having labour to sell. Practically its only other function round about that time was to administer the National Insurance Act of 1911, and to pay out the benefits provided under that act to those for whom no work was available. It may be remembered in passing that the maximum rate of benefit did not exceed 7s. per week and that it was paid for a strictly limited period. By 1918 there were four million insured workers and the employment-exchange system became a permanent part of the state structure. The end of the war of 1914-18 brought the almost simultaneous release of hundreds of thousands of workers from the production factories and the armed forces for whom other work was not immediately available.

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The existing Unemployment Fund would have been exhausted within a few weeks if it had been called upon to shoulder this new commitment, and a device known as "out of work donation" was introduced to save the situation. Its originator was the then Prime Minister, Lloyd George, and it was probably as good an insurance against that social upheaval which would otherwise have ensued as any other. Ex-service men received a non-contributory allowance for at least six months, while frantic attempts to resettle them in industry were made. Every possible expedient was tried out, from the King's Roll scheme which urged employers, including many war profiteers, to take their quota of disabled men (some of the ex-service organizations described this process as "selling crocks to crooks") to vast training schemes which very often failed in effect because by the time the training was completed the job was non-existent. Desperate attempts were made to solve the problem of reabsorption by the creation of public works. Arterial roads for instance were constructed and the writer has knowledge of one area in which at the first whisper that work was to commence the local exchange was stormed by hundreds of work-hungry ex-servicemen, some of them badly disabled. The staff handling these and other urgent problems were almost entirely composed of temporaries, themselves on wretched rates of pay. There was a time in fact when a cashier, himself a disabled ex-service man, and paying out weekly more than £3,000, was in receipt of less than £3 a week. And then followed the years of alternate boom and slump with the unemployment figures mounting to unheard-of heights and in the depressed areas comprising sometimes more than half of the population. Again the Unemployment Fund became unequal to the strain imposed upon it, and another form of public assistance for those who had exhausted benefit under the Insurance Acts was introduced.

These were the days of the means test and the wholesale transference of labour from the so-called "special areas" to new industries in other parts of the country—days in which the staff of the Ministry of Labour were making acquaintance at first hand with the tragic results, in terms of wasted human

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effort and productive capacity, of an unplanned post-war economy. Today the same staff are facing a very different problem. With the war-time phenomenon of full employment its principal task is the disposal of the nation's man and woman power to achieve the maximum war effort. Every employment exchange therefore is also a National Service Office and the scope and function of the ministry has been enormously extended. It has been the registering agency for the armed and auxiliary forces. It has had to handle the countless difficulties involved in the Schedule of Reserved Occupations and it has had complete authority over the disposal and movement of labour under the Emergency Powers Act. It has directed millions of workers into the jobs waiting for them and has been given restrictive power under the Essential Works Order to prevent either employer or worker from parting company. It has taken over certain functions hitherto exercised by the Home Office in connection with factory inspection and welfare, and it is already preparing for the second time within a quarter of a century its plans for post-war resettlement.

This is an amazing history of the development of one state department and of the impact upon it of drastic social change, including two major wars and the uneasy peace which separated them. In its administration it has inevitably been conditioned by the economics of the situation from time to time. In boom time it acted as an exchange mart for human labour. When the slump came its chief function was to administer the Insurance Acts and to pay out money. In the last immediate post-war period it did both and endured continual frustration in its attempt to fit square pegs into round holes. In this war it is discharging responsibilities in relation to what should be, but still is not, a total war. The next phase of its development will be determined by the extent to which the full-employment circumstances, which up to the present only war has been able to produce, are carried over and continued in conditions of peace. If that happens it will be a great day for the employment-exchange staffs and some compensation for the grim and depressing tasks which under the existing dispensation

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have fallen to their lot. Meanwhile, the lessons of the limitations imposed upon a government department by a system based on private enterprise are writ large in the history of the Ministry of Labour.

We cannot do better in closing this chapter than refer to the special position of the Assistance Board in relation to the ameliorative processes which in large measure or small arise out of and accompany a stage of monopoly capitalism in which it can still make reformist concessions to public opinion. This department takes up the story of state aid for the discards, temporary or otherwise, of the system where the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Health leave it.

It was not until 1930 that the Poor Law of bumbledom was renamed Public Assistance and the mantle of the Boards of Guardians descended upon the County and Borough Councils. We have already noted that because of the acute industrial depression of the between-war years the Unemployment Fund verged on bankruptcy and it became necessary in the interests of sound, orthodox finance to transfer that part of the unemployed community which had exhausted its benefit to another agency which would make provision for it on a basis of need. It was in 1934 that the Assistance Board was set up to administer this new service, and by 1935 it had become directly responsible for 800,000 unemployed persons and indirectly for almost another two millions of their dependents. From this time onward, the local authorities were responsible only for certain non-insurable and special categories. To cope with the rest, the new board opened 350 local offices and appointed 130 appeals tribunals. It embarked on research directed towards ascertaining the reason for long periods of unemployment (a little naïve this perhaps) and gave individual attention to the more chronic cases. It prescribed courses of training, particularly for young people, and provided certain welfare facilities. When the war came the board experienced the modifications and extensions of function that as we have seen created big problems of organization and administration for every department. Among its new tasks were included the assessment and payment of allowances to

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civilians incapacitated by war injury, the payment of supplementary pensions and later the examination and settlement of claims for immediate relief, as a result of air-raid damages. For this latter purpose it organized a fleet of mobile offices to handle claims within a few hours of an actual raid.

There is probably no part of the state apparatus which has done more to impress upon its staff the need of a humane and understanding approach towards the public it serves. That is due in very large measure to the willingness of the administration to utilize the experience gained by the staff in what one might call laboratory conditions. This is not to suggest that there has been a complete absence of bureaucratic tendency. A department which has to depend very largely on the accurate completion of forms could hardly avoid that; but there is evidence to show that the staff have not been slow to acquire the knowledge with which all civil servants should be equipped—a knowledge of the feelings of the person confronting him on the other side of the counter. It can have had no more delicate or disagreeable task than the administration of the means test and the determination of the degree of dependence upon others by reference to which the payment of public assistance is normally calculated. At the same time it can have had none more likely to open the eyes of its own employees to the larger political implications of a system with the worst results of which they are daily and hourly confronted. The Assistance Board is in the nature of things an 'ambulance' section of the monopoly-capitalist state. With the experience it has gained, can it be doubted that it could in different circumstances make a big contribution towards the implementation of the government's scheme of social insurance and find a place within the framework of a comprehensive Ministry of Social Security in which it could assist greatly in the process of post-war reconstruction?