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Public Service Administrators Should Have University Training

DOES the present system of recruitment, training, and promotion ensure that the best men occupy administrative posts in the Public Service?

Mr. W. H. Stanford, of the Accounts Branch of the General Post Office, asked that question in an address he gave to the South Australian Regional Group of the Institute of Public Administration on "Is a University Training Essential for Administrators?"

A certain standard of education was required, he said, to pass a competitive examination for entry into the service and in the Commonwealth Public Service since 1925 a limited number of officers had been selected for further training at the universities.

In the past the training of junior officers had been undertaken by senior officers, which meant that they had to learn their job by doing it, with the danger that the methods followed by generations of public servants would be accepted as good enough for the present. That was the opposite of progress and could only result in mental laziness. In any case, the efficiency of such a method of training was open to question, and at its best was nothing more than rule of thumb. Ultimately a few of these officers, having enjoyed a fairly long life, aspired to administrative posts.

Until a few years ago the practical training thus received would no doubt

have been sufficient to meet requirements. Present-day conditions, however, were constantly changing, and this rendered a higher standard of education more necessary than formerly. The art of public administration required more than the gift of commonsense, and such qualifications as were now required could not be gained simply from day to day experience.

This brought him to the question, he said, of whether a position had not been reached in Australia when future administrators should receive a university training.

What was required was an educated and disciplined mind. The use of the word "discipline" in this connection had been defined as "learning how to think straight, cultivating mental curiosity, forming positive habits, and avoiding negative ones, learning how to go after facts and how to relate facts to problems, how to analyse, interpret, and use facts."

The high efficiency of the British Civil Service was attributable mainly to the practice of recruiting administrators from the universities, and the United States of America, France, and Germany were also adopting that system. If the objects of the Institute of Public Administration were to be realised in Australia it was apparent that use must be made of the experience of other countries.

There were two alternatives; either recruiting direct from the universities, or training at the universities after entry into the service. It was highly probable that the first would fail to meet with the approval of public opinion in Australia on the ground that it would reserve the best positions in the Public Service to a favored few. The second would not be subject to such objection, and would tend to preserve the competitive aspect as a wide field would be available from which to select suitable trainees.

How was the transition from the old style administrator to the new to be negotiated? Obviously, having trained the future administrator at the public expense, it would be sheer waste and morally wrong to relegate him to routine work until such time as his chance for promotion came. Changes always engendered opposition, but then one of the greatest pains to human nature was the pain of a new idea. However, the past could not be permitted to ride on the back of the present.

The transition stage could be successfully passed if, as trained men became available, they were employed as assistants to officers in administrative positions with a view to assuming control when those officers retired, which would overcome the objection that the prospective appointee lacked practical training for the position.

EDUCATION UP-TO-DATE

"Experiments in Educational Self-Government." By A. L. Gordon Mackay. London: George Allen and Unwin.

Mr. Mackay's main thesis is the value of what he designates self-government in schools and universities. It is a kind of adaptation of the Dalton system, the students being formed, or forming themselves, into groups for the discussion and mastery of subjects assigned to them. The groups would have chairmen appointed by the members and responsible, with themselves, for the conduct of the proceedings. They would hear a lecture primarily intended to stimulate their energies, and every three weeks their work would be considered and appraised by the lecturer, group being taken by group; and this would be followed by a general class meeting at which the work of the groups would be considered as a whole, questions asked and answered, suggestions discussed, and further assignments of work allocated. It is claimed for the scheme, which has other features also, that it prevents cramming, develops confidence, promotes a wholesome clash of minds, cures nervousness, and cements useful friendships in relation to the academic life.

Work of the Teacher

The teacher's role is that of prompter, inspirer, and ultimate referee. He watches the groups, takes notes, forms silent judgments, but interferes as little as possible. In short, the whole object apparently is to place the social aptitudes of the students at the service of their intellectual advancement, so that, just as a walking tour will be undertaken more profitably and pleasantly in company than when alone, so an exchange of thoughts and criticisms will keep the student alert and diligent as he plods his way through the groves of academe to the goal of a pass. It is admitted that the plan depends very largely for its efficacy on the student-chairman, who acts as a sort of intermediary between the student and the teacher, censors the questions a student may put to the teacher, admitting some, taboos others, and keeping an alert ear for the answers, lest they should be beyond the intelligence of the enquirer and his fellows, in which case, the teacher is requested to explain. The teacher makes himself accessible to the students individually, a stated period being set apart for the purpose three times a week. The system is applicable to schools of all grades, as well as to Universities, and Mr. Mackay has had a long, wide, and successful experience of it with students of all ages and calibres. In the Adelaide University he employed it with the best results in the teaching of economical science, economic history, and public administration and finance.

A Contrast

Where universities are concerned it contrasts most favorably with the orthodox system whereby the student is left alone to rise or fall, "stew" or loaf as he pleases, till the examinations, his only obligation being to attend the prescribed lectures. Personal contact between the teacher and the pupil is now limited, and no more is expected from the student than to memorise his lecture notes and facts or passages from prescribed books, which is technically called "reading." The procedure, it is contended, is good neither for the student nor the lecturer. The former is deterred by fear of offence from asking questions which the lecturer may be unable to answer, and the lecturer misses the salutary criticism of his ideas, which Mr. Mackay's plan invites. The plan makes a strong appeal to the thoughtful educationalist, as suggesting a remedy for the evils of cram, on the one side, and sluggishness on the other. It has a psychological basis, and might claim as its motto Crichton Miller's contention that self-realisation comes through achievement, rather than instruction.

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Charge for N.S.W. University Examinations

Sydney, August 20. The Government has decided to charge candidates for the intermediate and leaving certificates fees to sit for the examinations this year. It is estimated that the revenue will total about £16,000.

Exemptions will be granted where pupils had been awarded bursaries or where the parents of a pupil have an income of not more than £60 a year for every member of the household dependent on that income. In the latter case children earning 15s a week or more will be excluded from the dependency condition.

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PUBLIC SERVICE RECRUITS

Change in Entrance Standard

LEAVING EXAMINATION

THE entrance examination to the clerical division of the Public Service is equivalent to the intermediate examination of the University.

Dr. W. Christie (Principal Medical Officer in the Education Department) is of the opinion that no good purpose can be served by retaining the intermediate examination as the entrance standard, and that it would be better if a candidate for a position in the service were required to pass the leaving examination.

Addressing the first annual conference of the South Australian regional group of the Institute of Public Administration, he said that the leaving examination was the entrance standard to degree courses at the University. Since the majority of boys were ambitious it followed that those who entered the Public Service would desire to occupy positions as high as they could reach. If the intermediate standard were retained a boy who wished to improve his position would require to continue his studies in general subjects for about two years after he began work.

Dr. Christie did not advocate the leaving commercial certificate as an equivalent standard. Commercial subjects, he said, could be taken alongside; they had a definite bearing on his work and were likely to be studied with more interest. Were such candidates exempt from certain subjects in their grade examination they could give more time to subjects with definite bearing on their work.

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR

Research in public administration was very much alive. Workers in different countries were making intensive studies in all its branches. Not only did this higher standard apply in Government service, but there was also a tendency everywhere for Government work to become more and more complex as new functions were thrust on the different departments, requiring a higher standard from the recruits.

Thus the leaving examination was a reasonable standard to expect from an applicant because—

- It enabled him to commence his special studies immediately.
- It opened the way to higher studies.
- It enabled him to get degrees or diplomas as University recognition of his success.

Against this raising of the standard there were many objections.

The answer to the first, "If raising the standard, why stop at the leaving examination instead of the leaving honors?"—was that they must have an entrance examination which would indicate the candidate's fitness for his future work. But a standard which was satisfactory for entering the service was not necessarily the best for the candidate who wished to undertake more advanced work. The Uni-

versity accepted the leaving standard as the basis for future study. The Government could do the same; any higher standard would unnecessarily raise the age of entry.

COMPETITIVE EXAMINATION

A second objection was, "Why not have a competitive examination?" If 30 vacancies occurred and only 30 candidates took the examination, then everyone would pass unless there was a fixed minimum standard. If a large number of candidates took the examination and only 30 reached or exceeded the pass standard, then some of the 30 might have only just scraped through. If 60 passed, then the 30 required would be taken from those at the top of the pass list. In other words, the standard would vary according to the number of vacancies and the number of those passing the examination. The admission of such a big element of chance was not fair to the candidates.

No one could accuse the University of bias. The examination and the examiners were quite impartial, making the examining authority an outside body. Their certificate was accepted by the State Public Service, and there was no reason why their leaving certificate should not be so accepted.

To the objection that if they raised the entrance standard many candidates for Government service would enter other professions instead of joining the Public Service he replied that at present they did not get the rejects—those who were not able to pass into something better.

With the statement that not everyone wished to get a degree or diploma he agreed, but with the raising of the standard of education there was no guarantee that what was a reasonable standard of proficiency in the Public Service today would be a reasonable standard tomorrow.

MUST HAVE PERSONALITY

It would be urged that a higher standard demanded higher pay, either because of the high standard or because of the greater age of applicants. But a candidate who had already reached that higher age got the higher salary on his inferior qualifications.

Considered from these standpoints it would appear that there was nothing to be said against the adoption of the leaving certificate as the standard for entrance to the Public Service, and much to be said in favor of it.

Having passed the entrance examination the candidate should have to appear before a board, a committee, or an individual who would assess his personality. That was a very necessary procedure. It was not easy to get rid of an unsuitable public servant. Every care should be taken that the personality of the candidate was such as would enable him to discharge his duties with efficiency and with a minimum of irritation to those with whom he came in contact. The service was not the place for the human bogiehog. An experienced selector would get the type of man best fitted for the service. Examinations alone were not enough. Personality alone was useless. The two must be combined to give the ideal recruit.

Adv. 25-8-31

Sir William Mitchell (Vice-Chancellor of the Adelaide University), who went to Melbourne to attend the biennial meeting of the standing committee of the Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide Universities, returned yesterday morning to Adelaide.

Mail 29-8-31

SALARY CUT

AT 'VARSITY

20 Per Cent. Now

STANDARD TO BE MAINTAINED

BECAUSE the council of the University of Adelaide has agreed to convert its £405,000 worth of bonds, the annual income of this institution will be reduced by £1500.

"On this account," said Sir William Mitchell (vice-chancellor) today, "the council will find it inevitable to ask its professors, full-time lecturers, and members of the permanent staff to accept a further reduction in salary of 5 per cent."

SINCE November the staff has suffered a cut of 10 per cent. Because of the payments from a special superannuation fund, which applies to the professors, full-time lecturers, and the higher administrative officers, having been suspended, their total salary loss will now be 20 per cent.

Sydney and Melbourne University professors have not suffered a penny reduction, but following a meeting of the Universities Advisory Conference in Melbourne last week, at which Adelaide University was represented by Sir William Mitchell, they will be called upon to make a sacrifice. In any case it will not be so great as that in Adelaide.

The decision to apply a cut to Adelaide University in November arose owing to the Government's decision to reduce by £6,000 its grant of £51,000 annually.

Sir William stated today that the chief subject for discussion at the conference was that of the declining revenue of the universities. Generally speaking there had been no special difficulty in applying the reductions to professors and lecturers already in office, most of the appointments of which were for life.

However, as the rates applying in Australia were already 25 to 50 per cent. lower than those in the 16 universities in Britain, it was felt that no new appointments could be made of professors until the universities were in a position to pay a better remuneration.

For that reason it had been decided to suspend the application of the retiring age, and keep the present men in office. The retiring age in Adelaide had been 70 years, and in the other States 60 years in some, and 65 in others.

"The Australian universities are unanimous," added Sir William, "that the high standard of the various chairs must be maintained, and that if any sacrifice is to be made because of lack of finance it must be by reducing the number of lower paid teaching services. This will mean that the students will be called upon to rely more upon books, and on their ability to work under direction."