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SOME PROPOSALS TO THE COMMITTEE ON THE CIVIL SERVICE<sup>1)</sup>

I. The functions of the Civil Service: Theory and Reality

One must start with the question; What does the Civil Service do? The doctrine is that it advises Ministers on policies and then carries out those they adopt.

Limits on Ministerial Power

The first part of the doctrine is a myth: civil servants very largely decide the policies themselves. Let me emphasise at once that I am not attacking the Civil Service. I have the greatest respect for their integrity, intelligence and devotion to duty which are, to my knowledge (and I have worked in several countries) unequalled anywhere in the world. My point is that the institutions are such that the doctrine cannot be true. No official secrets need be revealed to substantiate this. The doctrine requires a Minister to have the time, energy, intelligence and experience to master the great range of policy issues that face a modern department. It also requires civil servants to be sufficiently detached to be able to present to Ministers the issues that need resolving in a completely objective manner. In brief Ministers and civil servants would have to be something other than human beings.

The shortage of time is alone enough to invalidate it. In Britain a Minister has, from the very fact of being a Minister, a large number of jobs. He belongs to Cabinet Committees, if not to the Cabinet itself; he must be a member of Parliament, nearly always of the House of Commons; and he is a leading member of a political party. The responsibilities of mastering the business of the Cabinet and its committees, takes (or should take) many hours a week, apart from attending official functions of one kind or another as a government official. Any M.P.'s job is almost full-time in itself, if the day-to-day interests of constituents are to be looked after and the constituency nursed properly; a Minister has to be there periodically to answer questions, introduce or reply to motions, or speak in debates; and he has to be in the precincts of the House for long periods to respond to the Division bell. The Party itself, also imposes demands on a Minister's time - committee meetings, weekend and by-election speeches, etc. Finally, those who lobby for one cause or another have to be seen, especially friends or political allies.

The Minister has therefore to rely almost completely on the advice of senior officials, especially the Permanent Secretary. He sees very much less of the business of the Ministry than, say, a manager of a firm employing the same number of people. Both will of course delegate their power, but whereas the business manager selects consciously what type of decision to delegate, this vital selection is made for a Minister. He works virtually in the complete dark. By the time an issue reaches him, there is little left to decide; unless he probes deeply, he can draw only one conclusion. He sees few of the arguments which have been deployed and rejected at lower levels - whether within his Ministry or inter-departmentally. It would be naive to assume that information or policy alternatives are regularly kept from Ministers, but it would be just as naive to suppose that civil servants never do this; sometimes they feel strongly that the national interest requires certain policies to be adopted.

1) I have benefitted from the comments of many civil servants on an earlier draft. Most had better remain anonymous, but I would like to acknowledge a particularly heavy debt to Paul Streeten, whose views I have at places shamelessly appropriated.

Several Ministers are of course in any case quite happy to take over the policies of their officials. They may lack confidence in their own judgement or ability. A Minister knows, at the back of his mind at least, that he needs the co-operation of his officials. If replies to parliamentary questions are not prepared properly, he will be defenceless in the House. Officials, with their knowledge of the machinery of Whitehall, can help him enormously if they use it competently on his behalf. They in any case allow him the appearance of power (red dispatch box and all) so that he can without difficulty keep his self-respect.

One might expect that Junior Ministers would be able to delve more deeply into the roots of policies. But much of what has been said above applies to them too; although their fields are narrower, these are still too large to be covered properly by someone who can only work part-time. Each of the Junior Ministers at the Foreign Office, for example, is still responsible for too many countries and too big policy questions to be able to study them personally. Moreover, their position is fundamentally far weaker vis-a-vis the Civil Service.

Often there is a strong current running through Whitehall, the product of innumerable lunches and telephone conversations, one party in which is usually some senior Treasury official, and the tacit object of which is to steer Cabinet decisions. The issue will then be presented to the more important Ministers in such a way that a certain policy appears as virtually inevitable. A Minister who went against the consensus would sooner or later have to face the possibility of resignation (as would any Minister who disliked the politics of any of his senior civil servants so much that he wanted to change them). Since few Ministers have alternative sources of income that would yield them comparable status and living standards (especially since the jump in Ministerial salaries in 1964) this prospect is daunting. For Junior Ministers, resignation involves a great risk of never rising to the top in their career.

One small but not unimportant point is that minutes of meetings are always prepared by officials. Of course they do not consciously distort, but compressing ten or twenty thousand words into a few hundred gives a wide margin for judgement, particularly in selection of key points.

I am not arguing that Ministers are impotent. A Minister usually has hobbyhorses that officials will groom and train, and on some issues he may well insist on the need to suit the tactical needs of his party or himself. Sometimes, too, a Cabinet decision is not easy to predict. A Cabinet Committee deals only with residual issues which have not been resolved by the corresponding official committee, but these issues can be very important. The briefs from which Ministers speak are of course prepared in their departments, but a good deal depends on the skill with which the department's view is presented, particularly when expenditure is to be allocated.

Civil servants often wish politicians would give them clearer directives. A Permanent Secretary sometimes tries quite genuinely to formulate what his Minister would want, if the latter had the time and capacity to decide himself. Many at least believe they are doing this. But few Ministers have political views worked out in sufficient depth, or expressed clearly enough, for this to be possible. Party manifestoes are formulated so broadly (in order to be generally acceptable) that they provide little concrete assistance; and in any case the attachment of some Ministers to party doctrine is limited.

In order to test who makes policy a simple question can be put: Does the change of a Minister greatly affect a Ministry's policy? There can hardly be much doubt about the answer. The Evans-Christie case is a striking example of continuity in policy as Ministers came and went - so of course is virtually the whole of foreign policy. On the other hand, changes in senior civil servants have a noticeable effect on policy - particularly in the Treasury and the Commonwealth Office in the past few years.

## The Archaic Structure

The Civil Service must bear a share of the responsibility for our chronic difficulties.

Naturally, this is not to say that officials are solely to blame. A period of political and economic strain was inevitable for reasons that can be very briefly summed up as a swift transformation of the world, unfavourable to Britain, which is still continuing. ~~And, to generalise rashly, there are many other culprits: the Universities for failing to make sufficiently deep studies of our problems or to adapt their syllabuses to changing national needs; schools for teaching false values; the Press for its well-known superficiality; the political parties for seeking power rather than solutions to our problems.~~

But the Administrative Class, as the source of real political power, could have done much more to cure the other national weaknesses. Secondly, our problems would have been much less severe if serious policy errors had not been made.

The Service would have been (doubtless was) admirably equipped to deal with the problems of Victorian, perhaps even Edwardian, times. The most important virtue for the policies of a major imperial power was continuity, so that other governments knew where we stood, and how far they could go. There was moreover considerable room for manoeuvre up to 1914 - a British government could follow mistaken policies without courting disaster. Economic policy was hardly needed: the industrial structure could be left to adapt itself to economic trends.

Since 1914, the most important requirements have been flexibility and professional capacity, so that the country could be helped to adjust to a new role in a fast changing world. This required a different type of Civil Service. The Service ~~has~~<sup>has</sup> of course not remained unchanged, but power is concentrated in the hands of elderly officials who were mostly educated and entered the Service before the economic and political upheavals of the 1930's had begun to generate a critical atmosphere in the outside world, including schools and universities. Many have adjusted to the modern scene, but many clearly have not, and the drawbacks of the consequently archaic attitudes may outweigh the merits of experience, so that the officer concerned is a net liability for an administration facing the problems of the 1960's and the 1970's.

The Service does not have the means of assessing the reasons for past errors, and making the necessary reforms in its own structure, still less ~~is~~ attributing responsibility and getting rid of failures. Although politicians can lose office, individually and collectively, because of policy errors, the chief architects of the policies remain in office, and indeed become steadily more powerful, because of the growing pressure on Ministerial time. The Service partially believes the myth about its role, which provides a suitable excuse for mistakes. (I have actually heard an official\* who produced a paper early in 1966 predicting the imminent fall of the Smith regime because of economic chaos, which was prophesied in great detail, defend himself subsequently by saying that this is what he had believed Ministers wanted!)

There is normally no means of reforming the Service from outside. It is almost completely sealed off from parliamentary criticism, and it is protected from the press by security regulations and by the defence that civil servants cannot defend themselves. Politicians would be unwise to reform the Service themselves; it is reasonable to predict that press criticism would be severe. This is what makes the appointment of ~~a~~<sup>the Fulton</sup> committee so important.

## II. The Formation of Policy

Many people believe that the senior Civil Service acts as a conspiracy to outwit and neutralise politicians, especially of the Labour Party. It is true that higher officials seem to be broadly conservative, even rather chauvinistic,

\* In the Home Civil Service

in their outlook, as is only to be expected for elderly people of middle-class origin, expensive education and high income, in a country which until very recently ran an enormous empire.

But the Service rightly resents this charge. The great majority, if not quite all, try consciously to serve loyally the political leaders of the day. Moreover the Service is far from homogeneous; there is clearly quite a range of political attitudes.

The effect of the attitudes of civil servants on the content of policy is more indirect, through an almost unanimous reliance on intuition, and a distrust of systematic argument, especially where the content is highly quantitative.

This rather dilettante approach to life, common in Britain anyway, especially among those with Arts degrees, is reinforced by the pressing demands of immediate issues of policy which appear suddenly and, partly because of the weakness of preparatory work, unexpectedly. Issues of national importance are decided without the costs and advantages of the various alternative policies being assessed even roughly (though this seems to happen less frequently than it did a few years ago).

One feature of an aristocratic style of work is a courteous practice of taking account of the views of all officials of a necessary seniority, including those belonging to other departments. Yet there is little attempt to get to the fundamental sources of disagreement; these are papered over in compromises when briefs are drafted or committee papers prepared. Consequently basic objectives are rarely defined, and discussions are often repeated, sometimes over a period of months.

There are of course well-known virtues in this working style; it helps protect the country from doctrinaire extremism. Civil servants can readily communicate with each other, and negotiate their differences. If at times it creaks, the machine does work to incorporate relevant views in a paper by the date required.

However, there are also certain costs. In practical terms those who think are reluctant to examine the past for errors, or to visualise the shape of the future. Not having a firm basis for policy they tend to confuse the inherently desirable with the tactically necessary.

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Officials tend in any case to settle for policies that involve as little difficulty as possible for the Ministry in the short run, even if they involve a heavy price for the country in the end. This may also be the inclination of Ministers, since P.Q.'s are mostly aimed at unearthing mistakes in day-to-day policy.

One result of the lack of long-term strategies is that policy is unstable. Opinion often shifts in response to a single new piece of information (even a rumour) or more sharply with the change in chairmanship of key committees.

Through ignorance (in some cases contempt) of the work of the professions the Civil Service fails to make anything like full use of the professional resources of the country. Until recently the Commonwealth Office had not one professional economist or statistician even for a Division described as 'Economic'. The Board of Trade still manages without economists. Many Ministries, including the Foreign Office, still have no economist of standing and rely on do-it-yourself methods of research and diagnosis.

When professionals are brought in, they are often badly selected or misused. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries largely confine their economists to questions of accountancy, rather than the larger issues of policy - for example whether Britain should be growing sugar beet.

Some civil servants feel a surprising degree of confidence in their own ability to decide technical subjects - lack of any education or even systematic reading on economic questions does not stop them from expressing strong, even if vague, views on subjects such as international liquidity, views often based on the fashionable journalism of a few years previously. (Files, particularly those marked to economists, often refer to "take-off" and "self-sustaining growth", as if Rostow's work had never been the subject of devastating professional criticism.)

Paradoxically, professional opinion is sometimes treated with exaggerated respect. Those who have had purely a classical or literary education often fail to recognise the limitations of the social sciences and expect some uniquely correct "technical" answer to controversial questions which require political and social judgements.

These weaknesses are spread to other areas of public life by the official power of recommending to Ministers the names of those to be appointed to public committees, commissions, regional bodies, etc. The agreeable operator is generally preferred to the man with professional qualifications, especially if the latter is likely to raise difficulties.

I will not enter into detail on policy implementation, about which the committee will no doubt have received much evidence. I would just make two points. One is that implementation cannot really be separated from policy formation - the way in which policies are carried out, which is almost entirely a matter for officials, itself gives the content to directives as well as providing precedents for the future. Secondly, the slowness with which business is conducted (exemplified by familiar delays in handling correspondence with the outside world) is not due, except in rare cases, to incompetence, but to the very elaborate committee structure and to the centralisation of decision-making.

### Economic Policy

I could most easily illustrate the above from the work of the Diplomatic Service, which I know best and which is rich in examples, but since this lies outside your terms of reference, I will give some illustrations from domestic economic policy.

The senior officers of the Treasury see their function chiefly as that of curbing extravagance and strengthening the pound, rather than modernising the economic structure and promoting its development. They have no practical experience of industry or commerce, or even modern techniques of management; all face the prospect of retirement on a pension the purchasing power of which would be eroded by price inflation, and this tends (of course subconsciously) to reinforce preferences for stability rather than expansion.

It is true that the Department of Economic Affairs was set up (in 1964) with the responsibility of planning the country's economic development. But few of the economists concerned have had much previous experience in drawing up and implementing national plans, and the non-economists continue to exercise a great influence on actual policy (as distinct from writing plans).

The economic advisers who were brought into government have had on the whole little impact on policy, or even on the way in which policy is formed. (The main exception is Dr. Kaldor's three major new taxes.) One reason is that the senior ones were really brought in more for political reasons than for professional,

i.e. to make it easier for new policies to be adopted; they are therefore understandably viewed with some suspicion by permanent officials, and they are often bypassed on major questions of policy. Another is that some of them - especially those who have worked mainly at Universities - lack the arts of the administrator. (The economist tends to address himself to topics which interest him professionally instead of selecting the issues that really matter and following them through). In any case, for the reasons explained above, the senior Civil Service has a limited "absorptive capacity", to use a term from development theory, for professional opinions.

Broadly speaking, Treasury officials at any level are more competent than their opposite numbers in the DEA or any other domestic department, and they traditionally speak with great authority. Not merely do they decide fiscal policy and (to a considerable degree) monetary policy; day-to-day control of expenditure, gives them a big voice in all types of policy, apart from their handling of the promotion and transfer of civil servants.

To say that the pattern of public expenditure reflects the Treasury's influence is not to say that it shows a coherent strategy, however. The annual review of future expenditure plans is just departmental horse-trading. While some economic analysis is incorporated in the background papers setting the framework, there is no attempt to assess the respective economic consequences of (say) accelerating housebuilding or slowing down the expansion of transport, and the eventual pattern may well not be internally consistent or compatible with the anticipated rate of development. Indeed growth is treated for the exercise as a datum, unaffected by the amount or composition of public investment or the impact of overseas aid on the economic and political health of the rest of the world. But in such a free-for-all, the more or less steady influence of the Treasury in certain directions has a great influence on the outcome.

When expenditure is cut drastically, as it was in July 1965, the procedure is similar. A global figure is decided in advance, and the allocation between departments is worked out hurriedly, in the first place by Treasury officials, without estimating how much a departmental economy will improve the next year's balance of payments (the ostensible purpose of the exercise), still less the country's long-term economic strength. Some would describe this method of work as pre-Keynesian. The objective is to achieve a certain level of expenditure, not certain economic goals, and for this purpose, all expenditures are equal.<sup>1)</sup>

Another illustration has been the lack of clarity in policy about entering the European Common Market. Originally, when entry would have been easy, there was little official enthusiasm; and, although the balance of official opinion now favours entry, there is (and has been) sufficient opposition to inhibit successful initiatives. On the other hand, surprisingly little work has been done on the implications of alternative strategies.

1) Prof. F.G. Bailey's recent paper "The Peasant View of the Bad Life". (The Advancement of Science, 23, 1966-7), analysing the resistance to modernisation by the hill peasants of Orissa, makes one point that is not inapposite. Speaking of planning, in the sense of aiming at a different structure rather than merely making provision for the future, he says "They do not reject the idea as wicked; they simply do not have the category."

### III Proposals

The significance of the Committee's appointment is that it provides a rare chance to make British administration more flexible and able to contribute more effectively to the country's modernisation, breaking the vicious circle of economic stagnation and political futility which might otherwise in due course reduce our status to that of other ex-imperial powers such as Austria, Spain and Portugal.

If I were a member of the Committee, I would treat the problem as a familiar one in development theory of how to induce change in a static society where political power remains permanently in the same hands. The best strategy is usually in such a case to prepare a "package" of key reforms that will reinforce each other.

Many innovations which are good in themselves may be counter-productive, if made in isolation. One example is the proposal to broaden the basis of entry to the higher ranks. There is a strong case for this (though not so strong as in the Diplomatic Service), but if this were the main change, it would have little effect during the three decades that it would take for new recruits to reach the top. It does not in fact really mean change at all, provided the establishment is left with the means to mould the next generation into a copy of itself.

In itself, therefore, widening of the sources of entry is likely to lead to less, not greater, flexibility. The same applies to proposals to 'democratise' the Service by abolishing the distinction between the executive and administrative classes and facilitating upward movement; somebody who has risen from the lower deck is not usually one of the more enlightened members of the wardroom.

Reducing the security of tenure of civil servants would be particularly dangerous under present circumstances. No doubt many senior civil servants would have been dismissed a long time ago if they had not been protected by being established. But these would not necessarily or even probably have been the incompetent. The authorities would, not of course as an avowed or even conscious purpose, use the opportunity to get rid of internal critics. There would usually be perfectly valid reasons; unfortunately, the heretics in a closed society such as the Civil Service often have characteristics (such as bluntness of speech) which slow down or prevent their promotion, and this may in turn effect their efficiency.

#### A. Formation of Ministerial Policy.

##### (i) Political staffs

It should be accepted practice that a Minister brings his own immediate advisers with him when he takes office. These advisers, no doubt drawn partly from political party headquarters, should have direct access to him, but also freedom to discuss policy with officials, and to attend official meetings. They should be clearly identified as political appointments.

This measure should have the highest priority. It would help rehabilitate the service in the public's eyes. It would make policymaking more responsive to the tides of public opinion. It would free permanent civil servants for the job they are supposed to do, namely provide advice on policy decisions. It would free the top-level economic advisers from their quasi-political functions. It would provide some experience in the public service for those who would no doubt be potential Ministers.

There is nothing which makes this formally impossible at the moment. But an attempt by a Minister to establish such a staff would almost certainly arouse great resistance, including threats of resignations, which no Prime Minister could face lightly. What is needed is a statement by this Committee giving the reasons why such an innovation is necessary. No doubt many Ministers would not want to take advantage of this possibility. But after a few had done so, it could easily become accepted practice, as it is in France.

Problems of security would be raised. There would be greater dangers of leaks, especially by those who leave with a minister. But all proposals for making the Civil Service more flexible involve some relaxation of present security arrangements (as well as other risks), and the question is whether the dangers involved are as damaging to the national interest as continued inflexibility would be.

(ii) Outside Advice

One means of making policy more flexible in the next few years would be to organise regular meetings between the political heads of each Ministry, its senior civil servants and outside advisers. What is needed is not the typical 'advisory committee', meeting for a couple of hours two or three times a year, but meetings lasting two or three days, perhaps annually, at which a Ministry's whole strategy could be assessed and possible new initiatives could be discussed 'off the record'. Another would be to set up working parties of non-officials for the same purpose.

(iii) Planning Units

The need for a shift towards longer term policy implies the need for planning units in each Ministry, responsible for preparing medium and long-period (say, 5-year and 15-year) strategies. These units, composed of both administrators and members of the professional services, should keep in close touch with the Ministry's political staff and also the government's central planning organisation (see below). This change would again be dangerous unless the formation of policy is brought under tighter Ministerial control; it might prove merely a sophisticated cover for the continuation of existing policies.

(iv) Evaluation

Improvement in policymaking will be slow unless the reasons for past mistakes are studied. The planning units should be charged with the responsibility for doing this in each Ministry; and policy statements (especially national economic plans) should start from a diagnosis of the defects of the economy and an assessment of previous attempts to remove them.

This will require the removal of the ban on access to Cabinet minutes of previous Governments (and to minutes containing official advice). The price involved - some inhibition of advice and discussion - should not actually be great compared to the big stimulus this change would bring.

The head of this organisation would chair meetings of a committee of heads of these units to discuss drafts of an economic plan, and (later) its implementation, including changes necessitated by unexpected developments, such as foreign exchange crises. This committee would also be responsible for background work on the 5-year public expenditure programme, bringing out in their submission to Ministers the economic implications of various alternative programmes.

(v) Scope of Parliamentary Committees

The above suggestions would increase the influence of the political party in power. It should be offset by giving the opposition (and backbenchers) a greater chance to question and influence policy. There have already been suggestions that parliamentary committees should have the power to examine civil servants on the advice they give. This would be a major step forward.

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There is, however, a danger that such hearings, like P.Q.'s, would have the effect of making officials even more cautious and negative. Chairmen should be given the specific responsibility of seeing that questions are directed to general policy questions, rather than to detailed issues of implementation. Then senior officials would not only have to defend their policy publicly; they would have to pay serious attention to longer-period policy.

(vi) Security

Your committee should recommend a separate review of security clearance for recruits to the service (and those promoted to senior positions). The 'positive vetting' procedure reflects 'Cold War' tensions which have now become less acute, and many people are lost to government service who would be useful. It is true that heads of departments have some discretion in certain cases, but present procedures seem designed to minimise the risk of breaches of security rather than to maximise the national interest.

B. Structure of Government

(i) Responsibilities of economic departments

Placing an economic planning office within a government machine is a well-known problem in the administration of countries attempting to accelerate their economic development. A separate Ministry of Economic Affairs has nowhere, to my knowledge, been found a satisfactory solution.

One practical possibility is to attach it to the Prime Minister's (or President's) office. This can work if the head of government is able to devote a large proportion of his time and energy to ensure that individual Ministries respect the over-riding priority for development in all economic policymaking. Even then, the result is usually that the more orthodox officials of the finance ministry, which is deeply concerned with short-term policy, are perpetually in conflict with the planning unit, and the tension is likely to be damaging rather than constructive.

Given British traditions and the nature of the senior policymakers in the Treasury over the next few years, a better arrangement would in my view be to join up the responsibilities for economic and financial policies in one Ministry, despite the likelihood that, at least for some years, the entrenched weight of Treasury attitudes and practices will prevail. My reason is that in fact Treasury officials are already moving towards a more long-sighted and "economic" approach to many problems and that this process can be accelerated by creating an organisation with more specifically economic responsibilities, and containing a large fraction of professional people.

What I suggest is that the staff of the DEA should be brought into a single Ministry with those parts of the Treasury responsible for taxation and the pattern of spending, the new Ministry being given the specific responsibility of promoting development as its highest priority, which could be symbolised by calling it a Ministry of Development and Finance. This new Ministry would co-ordinate the work of economic planning units in other Ministries, and ensure that public expenditure plans and monetary policy were consistent with long-term economic development.

(ii) Interdepartmental Committees

The speed and efficiency of work would be greatly increased if the inter-departmental structure were simplified. The present practice of arranging meetings attended by all departments who might conceivably be affected, and then repeating many points of the same discussion at higher levels, means a gigantic waste of expensive time. It also gives an effective veto power on new initiatives to departments not closely concerned.

The responsibility for policy formation should rest squarely with the Ministry concerned, which should consult others only to the extent that this is unavoidable. Except for economic policy issues, one meeting between representatives of departments immediately concerned should normally suffice; many more issues should be cleared by personal discussion (generally by telephone). Some inconsistencies in policy would be inevitable, but these are common anyway in economic policy (see Section II) and they would be reduced if the new economic ministry (proposed above) played its proper role; in any case on a limited scale they would be a price worth paying for greater speed and more positive attitudes.

### C. Personnel

#### (i) Early retirement

To make early retirement easier would on balance improve efficiency substantially and quickly. Measures to facilitate retirement would also be more humane: some older members of the Service will find it increasingly uncongenial if it is modernised.

At present, a civil servant who retires early has to wait until he is 60 before he receives his pension. One way of accelerating retirement would be to allow any officer who retires after his 50th birthday to receive an actuarially calculated gratuity in lieu of pension, or a reduced pension starting immediately and to make retirement at 60 more common. Another possibility would be to limit, say to six or seven years, the time anyone remained in the Service after reaching the rank of Deputy Secretary.

Many valuable people would be lost. But many of the best civil servants could be more likely to stay if they felt there was a prospect of promotion becoming easier, and the Service rejuvenated. Besides, against any net loss must be set the need to get rid of many whose influence and advice are, on balance, no longer of positive use.

#### (ii) Delegation of power

The Civil Service is overstaffed. Devolving power to lower levels would not merely reduce the movement of files and delays in correspondence; it would also help to shift policymaking to those with more up-to-date attitudes.

It would be wrong to expect much economy of staff, but to set a ceiling for five years on the numbers in the administrative grade, after the planning units have been set up, would compel streamlining, including a reduction in number and size of committees.

#### (iii) Greater professional competence

A number of suggestions have been put forward by others to raise the professional level of the service. It has been rightly argued that relevant specialised expertise should be required from all recruits, that there should be more in-service training facilities and that regular opportunities should be provided for work outside the service. I will not waste the Committee's time by going over this ground again.

One need, which may not have been so frequently put forward, is to depart from uniform salary scales. (~~I realise that salary levels are outside your terms of reference, but questions of administrative structure make discussion of salary differentials unavoidable~~). It is proving, for example, difficult to recruit and retain economists, under present conditions. Because of the unattractiveness of pay and conditions, only a small proportion of the Government Economic Service is established. There are also chronic shortages of statisticians.

The crux of the matter is that the market for people with technical qualifications is becoming much tighter than for those with degrees in classics, history, literature, theology, etc, and salary scales outside Government are rising rapidly under the influence of the fast climb in American professional salaries. Members of the professional services in governments, on the other hand, are under some disadvantages; they are unlikely to be promoted to really senior positions, and they mostly have an "advisory" rather than policymaking status vis-a-vis administrators even on questions which require professional competence. Yet they are only paid the same salaries as those who would in many cases find much greater difficulty in getting employment outside government.

Until the service as a whole becomes more professional, salaries for economists and statisticians should be significantly higher than for the corresponding administrative grades. (Premia are also no doubt needed for the scientists). The need is particularly great for the ages 24 to 28, where professional salaries are determined by the scale for Assistant Principals, a probationary grade, and are out of line with (e.g.) university scales.

The government would in this way give a lead to other organisations on salary policy, and encourage schoolchildren to specialise in technical subjects.