

This is a 1942 civil service reform agenda in the form of (a lightly edited) extract from
Harold Laski's 1942 introduction to ...

J P W Malleliu's "*Passed to you Please*" - Britain's Red-Tape machine at War.

Culture

1. The present pretty rigid separation between the national and local Civil Service should be abolished. Transfer from the one to the other should be normal and not exceptional.
2. The present fairly rigid barrier between the administrative side of the Service, on the one hand, and the scientific and technical sides on the other, should be withdrawn. The qualities which made Sir George Newman so distinguished as Chief Medical Officer to the Ministry of Health ought to be considered as not less relevant to the highest administrative posts.
3. Where the administrator and the scientific specialist disagree over a policy in which the expertise of the specialist is important, it should be customary for the Minister to hear the specialist's view directly if that is desired by the specialist
4. The Parliamentary heads of Departments must find time to know more of their officials than the half-dozen permanent chiefs and the particular experts in charge of some aspect of policy with which they are dealing.
 - a. A wise chancellor of the Exchequer would have heard Mr. Keynes before he revalued the pound in 1928; it is not sufficient compensation to confer a peerage on him in 1942.
 - b. Generally, it maybe said that the atmosphere of the Departments, especially the more historic ones, is still too much that of a Royal Court with an excessive emphasis on the prestige of status and an undue desire to safeguard the Minister from the blast of inconvenient cross-currents of doctrine, especially where these come from below and not above.
5. It is important to realise that no official failure of the modern times has been so outstanding as that of the Diplomatic Service in the inter-war years. It has lacked knowledge, energy, and vitality; its contacts have been painfully narrow; and its criteria have belonged to a dead world.
 - a. Anyone who compares Sir Neville Henderson's *Failure of a Mission*, with the American Ambassador's Mr Joseph E. Davies' *Mission to Moscow* will at once see the evidence for this argument.
 - b. So long as British society remains the curious mixture of aristocratic remnants, plutocratic influence, and a popular base from which the occasional elements, judged sound, are permitted to stray upwards, our Foreign Service will be adapted to climates of opinion like those of Franco Spain or the Vatican, but they will be largely irrelevant in Moscow or Washington; and proposals like Mr. Eden's will only enable the problem to be evaded for another generation.

Openness, Interchange

6. While recruitment by competitive examination is likely to remain the main source of appointment to the Service, it will require to be supplemented by other methods. Officials will be drawn from personnel above the normal age of entry to the Administrative Class on the ground of special qualifications. Mr. Churchill's appointment of Sir William Beveridge to the post of Director of Labour Exchanges in 1908 is an example of the kind of thing I have in mind. Such men may be recruited for particular pieces of work, for a given period of time, or for the permanent staffs of the Departments.

7. The principle of sabbatical leave, with facilities for travel, needs to be developed. Officials need the refreshment which comes from the direct knowledge of foreign experience and experiment.

8. Both National and Local authorities ought to develop a much closer relation than at present exists with the Universities for the purpose of research into their problems.

a. It ought, e.g., to be natural for the city of Manchester to ask the Engineering Department of its University to report upon its electricity service, or the Colonial Office to use the Department of Anthropology in the University of London to study on its behalf the problems of economic reorganization in Malaya. The necessary safeguards of the relationship are: (i) the independence of the University in making the enquiry, and (ii) the publication of the results.

9. Far more encouragement should be given to officials to work independently at research in their field of work; the present ban on publication without permission should be revised. It ought to be as natural for a Civil Servant, say in the Ministry of Agriculture, to be encouraged by Mr. Henry M. Wallace, then its Secretary, to discuss the reorganisation of American farming. This attitude is desirable not merely because it aids the official to think out issues beyond the day-to-day problems of administration; it is also a useful check on the tendency of influence in the Departments to follow the line of the hierarchy unduly ; and it is one of the ways, at least, in which evidence of fitness for promotion can be objectively secured.

10. More adequate steps need to be taken by the Departments to humanise their public relations. This is not merely a matter of multiplying Press Offices. It is partly an endeavour, e.g., in the simplification of terms, to make the impact of its work as intelligible as possible; it is partly a matter of constant assessment of the effect of its work on those with whom it is concerned.

a. The Board of Education has a constant flow of reports on schools from its Inspectors; but it lacks any constant flow of reports on its Inspectors from teachers.

b. Nor are there enough independent enquiries into administration or sufficient mechanisms to see that reasonable action is forthcoming after important criticism has been received.

c. The folly, for instance; of the Colonial Office officials who took the possession of pamphlets by Sidney Webb, Tolstoy and Anatole France as evidence of a tendency to sedition among the Maltese ought not to be left to the Colonial Office to repair; for the evidence is grimly overwhelming that without, without persistent pressure in Parliament, or a Royal Commission, the Colonial Office does not correct it.

11. It is important to bring the Civil Servant in closer relation with members of Parliament. To this end, two reforms are desirable:

- a. (i) each Department of State should be related to an advisory committee of members of the House. These committees would be consultative and not executive. They should discuss policy with the Minister and his officials, initiate enquiries into administration, and be consulted on the issue of orders and regulations arising out of delegated powers.
- b. (ii) All Bills in the House of Commons, which are not discussed in Committee of the Whole House, should be considered by a procedure approximating to that of committees of local government authorities, where officials can attend for the purpose of giving information.

Organisation, Training

12. A separation will have to take place between the financial and establishment functions of the Treasury. A separate Minister of Personnel is required to whom all questions of recruitment, training, promotion, pay and other conditions of service will be entrusted. The present fusion of functions in the Treasury has the undesirable result of making financial considerations unduly influential in personnel problems.

13. A revision of methods of training in the Service is long overdue. This revision has two sides:

- a. (i) steps need to be taken to create a Staff College for the Administrative Class, and for promising recruits from the lower grades;
- b. (ii) a full scheme of training in the Service to enable the younger members of the lower grades to qualify for promotion to the upper grades should be instituted by the Minister of Personnel in conjunction with the universities.

14. Steps should be taken to make the comparative study of public administration an academic subject of university status with full facilities for research.

15. Decentralisation of functions wherever a department is regionally organised should be strongly encouraged; and, whenever possible, local advisory committees should be associated with the officials concerned. A Labour Exchange ought to have its advisory committee of trade unionists and employers as naturally as it has its manager.

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