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The Ministry of Health 1919-1929: Ideas and Practice in a Government Department

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Oxford by Stephen Stacey of Wadham College in Trinity Term, 1984.

The subject of the thesis is the Ministry of Health's first decade. The chapters may be separated into three loosely related parts. After an introduction setting out the scope of the study, the first part - composed of two chapters - concerns itself with the Ministry's origins and the early months of its existence. Its departmental antecedents are identified and their administrative cultures defined. The impact of the Report of the Machinery of Government Committee, 1918 (Cd. 9230) on thinking about the Ministry's organisation is assessed. The actual arrangement of the department's permanent staff is dealt with in the second chapter, the latter section of which charts the ways that changes in the department's operation reflect changes in civil servants' views about their bureaucratic function. Particular attention is paid to the Ministry's first permanent secretary, Sir Robert Morant; to the relations of the lay and administrative classes; and to the attitudes and thinking of Sir Arthur Robinson, Morant's successor.

The second part is a political biography of Neville Chamberlain, thrice Minister of Health and from 1924 to 1929 the sixth incumbent. It considers the elements in his family background and in his career that fitted him for this ministerial position; and it examines his work practices and relations with official advisers.

The subject of the third part - the last two chapters - is the condition of local government in the 1920s as perceived by various officials and members of government enquiries. It discusses the work of the Royal Commission on Local Government, 1923-29 and the drafting of the Local Government Act of 1929.

The thesis is completed by a conclusion and by four appendices. The first two list the Ministers of Health and their principal officials in the interwar period. The others provide details of the careers, hierarchy, and salary scales of the department's permanent staff. There is an extensive bibliography.

ABSTRACT

This abstract is divided into four sections in the following order:

i Aims of the Study
ii Materials
iii Summary of the Argument
iv Synopsis of the Contents

i Aims of the Study

Most political historians have had little to say about the civil service. They seem often to imagine that analyses of policies and policy-making in Britain need penetrate no deeper than accounts of party political, Cabinet, and parliamentary debate and decisions. This is odd. Policies have no effect unless implemented, and to be implemented they require to be acted on by civil servants. Their action is not merely a passive one for civil servants are also responsible for drafting the legislation that puts policies into effect. There is thus a tension, sometimes creative and sometimes destructive, between ministers and civil servants. This thesis has been written in the belief that a study of the work practices of a government department is not only a subject in its own right but also a revealing approach to a better understanding of the process of political change in which historians of government have traditionally been interested.

The thesis has three broad intentions. The first is to describe and account for the administrative culture of the Ministry of Health in the first decade of its existence.

It does so by a careful scrutiny of the personalities of some of the leading officials of the department and by an analysis of the changes in the thinking of two successive generations of administrators. This is set in a wider context of departmental work practices and external influences.

The second intention is to examine the political character of Neville Chamberlain, the most effective Minister of Health of the interwar period. His second period at the Ministry has not been examined adequately hitherto, yet it corresponded to - and, indeed, was largely the origin of - the years when he was at the height of his powers. The third chapter argues that the closeness of his work practices and outlook to those of his officials was not the least factor in explaining the legislative productiveness of his tenure.

The third intention of the thesis is to explain the origins of the financial provisions of the Local Government Act of 1929. Too often legislation is described as the product of the work of the minister introducing it or of the Cabinet giving it parliamentary time. This part of the thesis does not deny the parts played by Chamberlain and Churchill, the two ministers most prominently concerned in the bill's drafting; but it deliberately places the act in its proper historical context, and demonstrates convincingly that in essence it was the culmination of an extended period of enquiry and that it acted on recommendations of some antiquity.

In summary the thesis makes a case for studying the workings of government departments. Its conclusions do not change the face of political histories of the period: they add to

them. The thesis is intended to be a contribution to, and in some senses a modification of, the growing corpus of published and unpublished research on the machinery of government of the interwar years.

ii Materials

The central theme of this thesis is its effort to reveal the dynamic of the Ministry of Health. Two categories of primary source material seemed appropriate to the enquiry. First: the surviving departmental records now preserved in the Public Record Office; and second: collections of private papers gathered by the department's officials and political heads. The former was used extensively and profitably, despite the erratic preservation procedures of departments of state: but, with the exception of the magnificent archive of Neville Chamberlain, nothing of great significance now exists so far as the second category is concerned. Intensive reading of the journal Public Administration revealed a number of important articles in which civil servants gave vent, deliberately and incidentally, to their views on their occupation. Careful perusal of the papers of government committees of enquiry - both their reports and, where they have been preserved, their unpublished documents - illuminated opinion on questions relevant to the thesis' subject. Finally secondary printed matter - books and articles, recently published and contemporary to the period under examination - was of high value.

iii Summary of the Argument

The thesis rests on the assumption that the administrative culture of a government department helps to define the limits

of political practicability. It does not put it more strongly than that. Some commentators see ministers as being on occasions influenced to the point of domination by their official advisers. This was not the experience of Neville Chamberlain, the Minister of Health from 1924 until 1929. He and his civil servants worked contentedly together: they complemented each other. Chamberlain came to the Ministry not with a coherent programme of legislation but with a set of intentions to act on broad, general lines on certain of the department's responsibilities. His permanent secretary, Sir Arthur Robinson, provided a list of legislation which the department wished to see enacted; and Chamberlain, with an undisturbed tenure of nearly five years and with particular skills for ministerial work, achieved its wishes. The products, in so far as they relate to local government, are examined in the final two chapters.

The first two chapters concern themselves with the changing administrative culture of the Ministry in the 1920s. They reveal the extent to which one view of the bureaucratic function, never properly established, was wholly displaced by a generalist ethic. It is argued that the latter's characteristics included adherence to a limited pluralism, a form of democratic accountability, and an acceptance of due procedure and precedent. Civil servants in the Ministry of Health's local government division set high value on consensus as the proper solution to disputes, and this resulted in a conservatism that distanced it both from those who sought to enhance state intervention and those who wanted to diminish it.

Under Neville Chamberlain, the department's officials were faithful to his intentions. It is clear that they mirrored his essentially uncontroversial reformism. There were disagreements on points of detail but not on fundamentals. The mutual sympathy derived not from the domination of minister by officials but from Chamberlain's own political characteristics. The history of the Ministry of Health during 1924-29 is one of ministerial and official partnership, not friction.

iv Synopsis of the Contents

The thesis is prefaced by an introduction. It begins by explaining why it is that some of the chapters that follow concentrate not on the central administration of public health, as the title leads the reader to expect, but on officials' and government enquiries' definition of the problems of local government in the 1920s. It continues by identifying the thesis' particular theme, which is an account of the presuppositions of those behind the actors on the political stage; and by commenting on the intractable nature of the source materials necessarily used in a work of this kind. The introduction is completed by a description of some of the central points made by the thesis and by a justification for the study of elements of the machinery of government. The five chapters that follow are divided into three parts loosely related: an administrative history of the Ministry of Health's first decade; a political biography of its longest-serving Minister, Neville Chamberlain; and an account of the origins and significance of the Local Government Act of 1929.

The first chapter aims to identify the administrative legacy inherited by the Ministry of Health. It argues that there was a profound difference in the attitudes of the officials working in the Local Government Board and in the National Health Insurance Commissions, the two government departments which were combined in 1919 to produce the Ministry. Most members of the Board's permanent staff were personifications of the passive role of civil servants, expressing a pronounced belief in precedence and in the gradual development of institutions and policies. These characteristics derived partly from the inadequate number of higher officials and partly from a plethora of responsibilities. Most important of all was the requirement, imposed by Parliament, to superintend the actions of elected local councils, and through them to effect the policies of the Board's President. The Insurance Commissions, on the other hand, were quite different. Created in 1911 for the single purpose of administering the National Insurance Act, they were staffed by a small group of self-confident higher officials under the inspirational leadership of a leading exponent of the active role, Sir Robert Morant. With little day-to-day departmental business, these civil servants confidently schemed for an expansion of the nation's public health services under a new ministry of health. The Report of the Machinery of Government Committee of 1918 focused the ideas of the self-regarding members of this intellectual milieu, and its recommendations played a part in shaping the organisation of the Ministry of Health when it came into being during the following year. A discussion of the report concludes this chapter.

The second chapter examines the character of Sir Robert Morant, the department's first permanent secretary, and his ideas about public administration. It describes his attempts to implement his thinking by moulding the arrangement of the Ministry's permanent staff. It examines in particular relations between the Ministry's medically-qualified and lay administrative officials, thereby revealing differing understandings of the respective roles of professional and generalist administrators. This chapter concludes with an analysis of the dynamic of the Ministry of Health after 1920 under Morant's successor, Sir Arthur Robinson, from which it is evident that during the 1920s the department's administrative culture corresponded more closely to that of the Local Government Board than to that of the Insurance Commissions.

Neville Chamberlain's second term of office as Minister of Health forms the subject of the third chapter. Its material is divided into two substantive sections. The first examines early but enduring influences on him: his father, his family, and his experiences as a businessman and local politician in Birmingham; and it accounts for the esteem in which he was held by his officials. The second of these two sections describes aspects of his political and ministerial performance during these years. It concludes that Chamberlain's effectiveness lay less in formulating and securing the implementation of policies of his own than in linking together a large number of measures, many of them awaiting him on taking up office in 1924, into a cohesive programme that culminated in the Local Government Act of 1929.

The fifth and sixth chapters are devoted to an analysis of the problems of local government as perceived by government enquiries and officials in the Ministry of Health, and to an account of their response to them. Chapter four identifies two features in particular of the local government system: disputes between the local authorities' representative associations over the areas, and to a lesser extent the functions, of the units making up the system; and the demand for reform of the Poor Law. It concludes with a description of the work of the Royal Commission on Local Government, 1923-29 that is both an analysis of Ministry officials' attitudes to it and to local government, and also a case study in the use by government departments of committees of enquiry. Emphasis is placed on the Ministry's desire to attain agreement between the representative associations, not to remedy the objective conditions of local government. It exemplified in so doing its officials' guiding principles of pluralism and democratic accountability whilst at the same time using the commission to divert the attentions of its representative members from discussing aspects of the Ministry's plans for the reform of local government.

The fifth chapter is concerned with the Local Government Act of 1929. The act is placed at the end of a period of enquiry into the financing of local government that extended for over forty years. Clauses in the measure drew on conclusions to be found in the reports of departmental and inter-departmental committees and of commissions presented and published at intervals in this period. Direct party political involvement was limited to the Chancellor of the

Exchequer's extension of derating to industry and freight transport, a well-known feature of the act that had nothing to do with its other clauses. Some attention is accordingly given to the bargaining and counter-bargaining between Chamberlain and the Chancellor that followed the latter's determination to include derating in the bill. The chapter concludes with a section assessing the significance of the act. The thesis is completed by a conclusion, four appendices and a bibliography.

THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH 1919-1929:

IDEAS AND PRACTICE IN A GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The subject of this thesis is the Ministry of Health during the 1920s, its first decade; yet it scarcely mentions public health, not even its central administration. There are two reasons for this omission. The first is that at this time the department was in fact a ministry of local government amongst whose responsibilities public health was one of the most important. The Ministry thus dealt not only with health in all its many elements - preventive and curative, sanitary and insurance - but also, at one remove, with all the services provided by local authorities. Only in 1942, with the creation of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, and in 1951, when the Ministry of Housing and Local Government came into being, were the department's responsibilities reduced to the limited extent implied by its title.[1] Accordingly the thesis has more to say about local government than about any single local authority service, for the system of local government acted as a filter on the vision of the Ministry's staff.

The second reason why public health does not feature prominently stems from the particular theme which the thesis

1 The accompanying decline in the status of the Minister of Health is indicated in a footnote to appendix one

addresses. It is interested less in accounts of policies or of policy-making (though there is a good deal of intermittent discussion of these matters, especially in chapter five) than in the department's administrative culture. The objective has been to reveal the dynamic of the Ministry of Health, and to do so by a meticulous examination of the personalities and work practices of the department's permanent officials. The thesis is thus concerned with what is unsaid and unspoken, and of the presuppositions of those behind the actors on the political stage. Its focus is the point at which politicians and administrators and the interest groups in local government meet and interact; and its subject-matter is, to borrow Cowling's phrase, 'the high politics' of the agents of the government machine.[1] In other words, its concerns are these individuals' and groups' language, images, and myths. They helped to form their users' definition of the politically practicable.[2]

Such an inquiry chiefly involves what one historian has piquantly described as 'years of hard work at the rock face' of the departmental papers preserved in the Public Record Office.[3] Not for these workers the prolix collections of

1 Maurice Cowling The Impact of Labour 1920-1924 (Cambridge, 1971), p. 3

2 ibid., p. 4; see below, chapter four, section three

3 Roy M Macleod 'Statesmen Undisguised' American Historical Review lxxviii (1973), 1393

self-regarding politicians anxious to preserve their every private thought and public utterance.[1] They depend instead on allusive marginalia on the edges of often arid memoranda and on cryptic comments sometimes hidden in the midst of abstrusely technical minutes. The extreme harshness of the material will be well known even to those who have toiled briefly in this particular quarry. So far as unprinted primary sources are concerned, there is virtually nothing else on which to rely. With one exception, the civil servants with whom we are concerned appear to have left no diaries and no personal correspondence.[2] In addition official preservation policies, at best erratic and often irresponsible in their effect, have not eased the historian's task.

Though in these and in other respects peculiarly ill-adapted for the kind of enquiry here embarked on, sufficient material of value was found amongst the departmental records of this period to encourage some tentative lines of investigation.

1 Maurice Cowling lists fifty-three collections of this kind in the bibliography to The Impact of Labour. Compare the difficulty of establishing even the most elementary biographical data for civil servants active in this period (see below, appendix three)

2 See below, footnote to appendix three (The exception is Sir George Newman, whose daybooks are preserved in the Department of Health and Social Security, Alexander Fleming House, London)

Civil servants are by tradition and in practice reluctant to publish their views, but it was found possible to support and to add to the work at 'the rock face' with articles written by serving and recently retired officials that appeared in the journal Public Administration between the wars. In using these sources, it has become clear that the attitudes of civil servants in the Ministry of Health to their occupation were beginning to change during the decade under study.

The thesis begins with a survey of the three elements that influenced or combined to make up the Ministry of Health's internal structure. The department had two antecedents in the machinery of government: the Local Government Board and the National Health Insurance Commissions. The first may be characterised as conservative and slow-moving, responding - often belatedly - to circumstances, and seldom seizing the political initiative.[1] Its policy innovations were small scale; it preferred gradual incrementalism to the large gesture. Its reaction to the well-publicised housing shortage of the First World War - a cautious down-playing of the issue - was a case in point.[2] Many more active or interventionist-minded social reformers had come to despair of the Board's usefulness by the closing years of the war.

1 See below, chapter one, section two

2 The Housing Act of 1919 was the Ministry of Health's first major piece of legislation

The National Health Insurance Commissions, on the other hand, were quite different.[1] Of the four Commissions, the one based in London exemplified the political vision of a new generation of bureaucrats, representatives of an intellectual milieu with a rationalist and functionalist faith. They looked back to nineteenth century positivism and forward to a technological age. These officials believed passionately in an expertise derived from the concentrated intellectual effort on particular problems of an articulate and self-confident elite, self-chosen not elected. They were civil servants not politicians, and they argued for the political neutrality of their views by asserting that the modernity of their thinking was its own legitimation.

The Haldane Report of 1918 was this milieu's most cogent documentary expression.[2] The report's recommendations had a profound effect on the Ministry of Health's first year of organisation, partly through the appointment of one of the Haldane Committee's members - Sir Robert Morant - to the post of permanent secretary; and partly because the war had catapulted like- minded officials into positions of prominence in the civil service at a time apparently propitious for the interventionism they espoused.[3]

1 See below, chapter one, section three

2 See below, chapter one, section four

3 See below, chapter two, section two

Long-term thinking was characteristic of their approach to politics, and at the Board of Trade and the Ministry of Food no less than at the Insurance Commissions exclusive cadres of officials sought to rise above the day-to-day business of departmental work and scheme for the future. These departments had 'think tanks' that were perhaps the equivalent in civil life of the War Cabinet in the essentially military sphere.[1]

The reaction against this bureaucratic vision in the first years of the 1920s was spontaneous, and effective precisely because of the political circumstances of the time. Retrenchment and the determination to reduce intervention by the state in all parts of national life was hostile territory for the administrative functionalists. The generation of senior civil servants that came to occupy the leading posts in the early interwar years had strikingly different general principles.[2] It espoused many of the attitudes of an earlier period: precedence, pluralism, and democratic accountability, however imperfectly enforced even after the passage of the fourth Reform Act. In their terms the administrative functionalists were anti-democractic and ultra-rationalistic, a deviant development from a mainstream to which the immediate post-war years allowed a return.

1 See below, chapter two, section three

2 See below, chapter two, section five

The Ministry of Health of the 1920s offers a focus for these conflicting visions of the bureaucratic function.[1] Though its administrative culture had much in common with that of the Local Government Board, it was less antipathetic to policy innovation that its predecessor. The department's conservatism lay in its faith in consensus not in its unwillingness to play a part; and this was as much defined by its need to work through the agency of a complex structure of local authorities as by its deliberate and essentially uncontroversial reformism under Neville Chamberlain between 1924 and 1929.[2]

The final two chapters of the thesis describe some of the achievements of these years in so far as they relate to the reform of the structure of local government.[3] The context is one of the continuous evolution of policy over an extended timespan: the Local Government Act of 1929 is seen as the conclusion of a period of adjustment not as the beginning, nor even of the failure to begin, a new one. The legislation promoted by the Minister of Health in these years has been assessed hitherto in terms of its apparently piecemeal quality. In this thesis its contribution to the changes effected by the 1929 Act stand out more clearly. One example

1 See below, chapter two, section four

2 See below, chapter three

3 See below, chapters four and five

may suffice here. In this account the introduction of block grants in 1929 appears less the exclusive product of the Treasury's determination to reduce public expenditure as of inter- departmental bargaining and counter-bargaining, itself feeding off analyses of central-local financial relations originating in enquiries held thirty and more years earlier.[1]

A study of the working of one government department needs justification if it is not to be regarded as being as arcanely antiquarian as, it must be admitted, most of the histories of Whitehall departments have proved to be.[2] Recent studies, prompted to do for the twentieth century what had already been done for the nineteenth, have begun to describe the influence of permanent officials on the performance of transitory politicians.[3] In the opinion of one historian:

> 'In some respects the period (between the wars) is the one in which the higher civil service in Britain

1 See below, chapter five

2 The New Whitehall Series edited by Sir Robert Fraser

3 Gillian Sutherland (ed.) Studies in the Growth of Nineteenth Century Government (London, 1972); Kathleen Burk (ed.) War and the State (London, 1982) and the works therein cited (Dr Burk's book provides excellent and extensive bibliographies to the growing literature on the civil service in the first two decades of the twentieth century)

> probably reached the height of its corporate influence.'[1]

It was so principally because of its permanence, its small size, and the longevity of officials' appointments, especially those in the most senior posts; and, in the early 1920s, the rapid turnover of ministers.[2]

Yet, because of its character, the corporate influence of the civil service is not readily defined or assessed. Attempts to aggrandise permanent officials' attitudes into a coherent philosophy of administration have not been notably successful.[3] Scholars have pointed to the growing authority of the Treasury and to a personnel ethic that stressed the acquiring of administrative skills through practical experience in an attempt to explain the absence of legislative landmarks in the interwar years comparable to, for example, the 1911 National Insurance Act and the 1946 National Health Service Act. These points are significant, but it is clear that in the search for a culprit the civil service is a facile target.

1 Max Beloff 'The Whitehall Factor: the role of the higher civil service' in Gillian Peele and Chris Cook (eds.) The Politics of Reappraisal 1918-1939 (London, 1975), p. 210

2 See below, chapter two, section five; appendices two and four; appendix one

3 Rosamund Thomas The British Philosophy of Administration (London, 1978) is a diligent pursuit of glimpses of ideology through dense thickets of pragmatism

This study provides something of a corrective whilst at the same time underlining the general premise. In the 1920s officials in the Ministry of Health were broadly pluralist in outlook, conscious of their constitutional role and readily guided by precedent. This is what they meant when they spoke of 'general principles.' Viewing the leadership style of Lloyd George and 'the garden suburb' and of the administrative functionalists with distaste, there was a return to a faith in the gradual historic growth of institutions and to the due process exemplified by an earlier generation of administrators.

Most prominently distancing them from their predecessors was a belief in a form of democratic accountability, often expressed in a search for the middle road. None of this was clearly articulated; but it is evident that such thinking supported that of many national politicians, whose desire to promote an allegedly apolitical consensus is a well attested feature of much of this period. In this sense, a study of the Ministry of Health during the 1920s offers an approach to a facet of one of the major themes of the interwar years.

Finally it must be emphasised that there are no comparative perspectives in the chapters that follow: the thesis does not attempt to look consistently at departments other than the one that is its immediate concern. Nevertheless the material presented here and the conclusions drawn from it may arm those who examine other government offices of this period as they drill vigorously at that unyielding rock face.

CHAPTER 1

THE ADMINISTRATIVE ORIGINS OF THE DEPARTMENTAL STRUCTURE OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH

1. Introduction

2. The Local Government Board

3. The National Health Insurance Commissions

4. The Report of the Machinery of Government Committee, 1918

1. INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Health came into being on 1 July 1919. Major Astor, who was destined to be the Ministry's parliamentary secretary, told the House on the previous day that it was a department 'of which so much is hoped and so much is expected.'[1] Two reasons for calling it into existence had been identified by the Minister-elect, Dr Addison, in his introductory comments on the second reading of the Ministry of Health Bill. The Ministry was to deal, first, 'with a very positive national need: .... the promotion of the health of the people by the most practical and sensible means we can evolve.' His second reason was the Bill's 'central idea:'

> 'To try to fix responsibility and make it the duty of a body of men and a Minister .... to deal with the various aspects of this question, to unify the control, to get common direction and common policy.'[2]

This chapter seeks to explain why it was that the 'meeting of a very positive national need' came to be allied to the unification of parts of the machinery of central government hitherto separate. This union was integral to the new department. It represented not the making of something

1 Hansard, 5th series, 1919, cxvii. 708

2 ibid., cii. 1828, 1829, 1830

entirely new but the combining of existing institutions. Astor made its immediate administrative origins clear to the House.

> 'The Ministry of Health is being created, roughly speaking, by amalgamating the Local Government Board and the English Insurance Commission.'[1]

The Board and the Commission were neither congruent nor compatible institutions. Whilst the Board was a vestige of the night-watchman state of the nineteenth century, the Commission supervised a distinctively new relationship between the citizen-client and the state. One office was old and the other was new: one had a wide range of responsibilities and the other administered a single piece of legislation. The Board had been established in 1871, and by 1919 it had acquired an unenviable reputation for bureaucratic slowness and conservatism. The Commission, on the other hand, had been created in 1911 to implement and to oversee the operation of the National Insurance Act. Its officials characterised their department as dynamic and forward-looking. The combination of these two government offices, very different in most respects, presented particular problems for those involved, both politicians and civil servants.

1 ibid., cxvii. 708

This chapter is concerned with the administrative and political origins of the internal arrangement of the Ministry of Health. It is not much interested in the creation of the department per se: this has been extensively written about.[1] It examines the organization and the character of the Local Government Board and of the National Health Insurance Commissions whose permanent officials and political heads were to make up the staff of the new department. These two sections are followed by an analysis of the Haldane Report.[2] One of its signatories, Sir Robert Morant, was to become the Ministry of Health's first permanent secretary. The report did not create the Ministry but it did provide a blueprint for the department's organization. Much comment has been directed hitherto at the report's failure to bring about a recasting of the machinery of government. This section and the following chapter reassess the influence of the committee by examining its effect on the Ministry of Health.

1 Bentley B Gilbert The Evolution of National Insurance in Great Britain (London, 1966), pp. 131-147; and British Social Policy 1914-1939 (London, 1970), pp. 98-161; Frank Honigsbaum 'The Struggle for the Ministry of Health 1914-1919' Occasional Papers in Social Administration xxxvii (London, 1970); Kenneth and Jane Morgan Portrait of a Progressive (Oxford, 1980), passim esp. pp. 75-78; Paul Wilding 'The Genesis of the Ministry of Health' Public Administration xlv (1967)

2 Report of the Machinery of Government Committee, 1918 (Cd. 9230)

2. THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARD

The origins of the Ministry of Health may be traced to the early eighteen hundreds. Almost a century before the department came into being, Jeremy Bentham had devised a Cabinet of twelve ministers, one with the title 'The Health Minister' and the other described as 'The Indigence Relief Minister.'[1] (The separation of ministerial responsibility as between public health and relief is particularly interesting in view of their subsequent combination in the Ministry of Health.) Bentham's scheme was the first in which a department of health found a place on equal terms with the other agencies of central government. His rigorous application of a strictly functional principle necessitated such a department as a permanent element in the machinery of government, recognising as he did that the needs it was designed to meet were continuous and enduring.

Subsequent institutionalised demonstrations of state concern for public health followed a different premise altogether. Like their predecessors, they were ad hoc bodies, set up in haste to meet emergencies or the imminent prospect of them. The Central Board of Health, significantly established in 1831 by royal proclamation and not by parliamentary vote, had

1 Bhikhu Parekh (ed.) Bentham's Political Thought (London, 1973), p. 222

been a response to the presence of cholera in the same way as the Privy Council's Board of Health (1805), disbanded after only a year, had been to the threat of yellow fever. The Poor Law Commission (1834), the Registrar-General's Office (1837-38), and the General Board of Health (1848) had similar origins, building also on the residue of earlier institutions of state intervention. Thereafter perception of a role for a single government department exclusively concerned with public health in a way that would diminish or prevent outbreaks of pestilence by continuous effort over a long time went unexpressed until the creation of the Local Government Board.

The Board was set up in 1871. It was itself not new but an amalgamation of three departments: the Local Government Act Office, which was a part of the Home Office; the Medical Department of the Privy Council, both creations of 1858; and the Poor Law Board, formed in 1847. The union's catalyst was the report of the Royal Sanitary Commission (1869-71). One of its dicta had been that:

> 'It is expedient that the administration of the Laws concerning the Public Health, and the Relief of the Poor should be presided over by one Minister as the Central Authority.'[1]

1 Royal Sanitary Commission, second report (C. 281) Parl. Papers 1871, xxxv. 175 (repaginated 181)

The commission's report added that it was 'essential' that the state's public health duties should be transferred to the new office formed thereby.[1]

The forming of the Local Government Board represented another stage in the gradual enhancement of the functions for which it became responsible within the machinery of central government. Its three immediate departmental predecessors had enjoyed lesser status. They had members of the government as their spokesmen, and this marked a discontinuity from the 'irresponsible' Poor Law Commission and the General Board of Health of an earlier period, with both of which Edwin Chadwick had been notoriously associated. Though the Board's President - its political head - was a member of the Cabinet only in Gladstone's administrations before 1887, the appointment always carried the rank of a privy councillor thereafter.

It was by this unification of central government agencies that the administration of the Poor Law was added to that responsible for the local government system as a whole. This made the Board's duties appear all-embracing. Their comprehensiveness was succinctly indicated by Lord Haldane's Report during the course of its chapter on health.

1 ibid., para 14

'The Board is concerned in the first place with the conditions of environment that affect the health of the individual, and, in this capacity, exercises powers in relation to such matters as water supply, drainage, cleansing, and general sanitation, housing and town planning, the prevention of the pollution of rivers, the maintenance of the purity of food and drugs, and the provision of baths and wash-houses. In the second place, the Board exercises to an increasing extent powers which have for their object the conservation of health or the prevention of disease in the individual. In this capacity the Board is concerned with maternity and infant welfare, tuberculosis and venereal disease, with vaccination, and with the provision of hospitals by public authorities.

The Board also exercises a number of important functions which are not concerned, or are only indirectly concerned, with the health of the community or the individual, such as the general control of local finance and the audit of local accounts, the provision of public libraries, museums, and gymnasia, the administration of the Unemployed Workmen Act, 1905, and a variety of minor duties.

> The present functions of the Local Government Board also include the administration of the Poor Law, which is a composite system embracing the care of the destitute in all categories, including sick persons, mothers and infants, lunatics, mental defectives, children of school age, and aged persons, so far as any of these may happen to be destitute; the administration of relief to destitute able-bodied persons, and the administration of outdoor relief.'[1]

The Board's creation enhanced the status of these functions within the machinery of government; but the price paid was their multiplication to an extent that made the Board appear to be but the residuary legatee only of duties discarded or not wanted by other departments of state. From its origins it was what one historian has described the Ministry of Health as becoming: 'a Ministry of the Interior with a sanitary bias.'[2] It is scarcely surprising that one of the arguments of the Haldane Report was that the Board's functions should be distributed amongst other government departments, some of which would be created for the purpose. Only then, so it was argued, would its responsibilities be properly discharged.

1 Report of the Machinery of Government Committee (Cd. 9230): Parl. Papers 1918, xii. 58, 59

2 K B Smellie A Hundred Years of English Government (London, 1937), p. 386

The Haldane Report's line of thinking raises two sets of questions for the historian wishing to assess the Board's performance. The first of these addresses the Board's competence. Why was it that the Board was felt to be ineffectual? How did it become possible for an MP to declare in 1919 that 'the Local Government Board is a museum of lost opportunities'?[1] The second question concerns the nature of the remedy proposed by those who felt the Board must be improved on. Why did they insist on changes in the machinery of government as an essential prelude to the implementation of the policies they advocated and in which they felt the Board to be so uninterested? Why did they place more faith in bureaucrats than in politicians - that is, in Whitehall not in Westminster - as their agents?

The Board's performance was roundly condemned by some of its contemporaries, but not by all of them. Adverse comment concentrated on its personnel. The Webbs' reactions were typical of its harshest critics. Though they had at first welcomed the appointment of the trade unionist John Burns to the Board's Presidency at the end of 1905, they concluded despondently two years later that he was "becoming the most hidebound of departmental chiefs."[2] He never lost this

1 Hansard, 5th series, 1919, cii. 1880

2 The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb ed. Norman MacKenzie (London, 1978), ii. 278

reputation in their eyes. Eight years later, Beatrice Webb observed bitterly that, like Ramsay MacDonald, Burns had been "converted to the standpoint of the ordinary mild Whig governing-class man."[1] On the outbreak of war in 1914, she recorded her satisfaction at Burns' retirement from the Cabinet: it was, she thought, a "desirable" event.[2] She believed that he had come to personify all the inadequacies which she imagined had been demonstrated by organised labour's representatives in government. On the eve of the first minority Labour administration, she counselled against seizing the opportunity presented by the general election, "instinctively fearing the 'John Burns' attitude on the part of the Labour leaders when once they are face to face with officials."[3]

The Webbs turned against the Board because they felt that it had turned against them. They had tried but had failed to exert influence over its new President. Sidney Webb's letter of congratulations to Burns ended with the deliberately seductive comment that "I am always entirely at your service."[4] Within three months of his arrival at the

1 ibid., iii. 27

2 Beatrice Webb's Diaries 1912-1924 ed. Margaret I Cole (London, 1952), p. 26

3 ibid., p. 255

4 The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb ed. Norman MacKenzie (London, 1978), ii. 221

Board, they had invited Burns to their home. There followed a sustained campaign to convert him chiefly to what was to become the argument of the minority on the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress.[1] He proved as immune to their flattery as to their cajolery. They concluded that he was dominated by his officials and made complacent by their conservatism. They sought, unsuccessfully as it turned out, to insert amongst his subordinates a fellow believer and "a really strong (man)" such as Sir Robert Morant, the permanent secretary to the Board of Education and one of their close associates.[2] Burns ignored their recommendation. The Webbs' opinion of the Local Government Board derived essentially from its President's deafness to their advice, and did not represent simply a judgement on the Board itself. Their views have nevertheless had a decisive impact on historians and on writers on social administration of later generations.

Other commentators have also concentrated their attention on the performance of the Board's officials. Ensor thought of them as being 'constantly on the alert to hinder (the local authorities) and rarely, if ever, to help.'[3] Another and

1 See below, chapter four, section one

2 MacKenzie op. cit., ii. 54

3 R C K Ensor <u>England 1870-1914</u> (Oxford, 1936), p. 126

more recent view of the Board's civil servants was equally uncomplimentary.

> 'They were cautious and not very able ..... (and) reactionary: ..... (their) conservatism was compounded by the red tape that bound the Board.'[1]

The influence of Sir John Lambert, the permanent secretary from 1871 until 1882, was held to be especially pernicious. He was said to have 'exercised a remarkable power over Ministers,' preventing James Stansfeld, the Board's first President, and his successors from introducing reforms of any kind.[2]

By far the most influential school of interpretation (and one with which the Webbs were ultimately to have considerable sympathy) has emphasised not the supposed lassitude of an undifferentiated permanent staff but an alleged division between two sections of the Board's officials: those who had responsibility for the Poor Law, and those concerned with public health. The former, mainly made up of lay administrators, had previously worked in the Poor Law Board; and the latter, composed chiefly of officials with medical qualifications, had come from the medical department of the Privy Council and from the medical professions outside the

1 Kenneth D Brown John Burns (London, 1977), pp. 199, 200, 112

2 J L Hammond and Barbara Hammond James Stansfeld (London, 1935), p. 108

civil service. It was said that these two groups could not work harmoniously in the newly established Board until the medical civil servants were allowed access to its Presidents on terms equal to those enjoyed by the senior lay administrators. Lambert had insisted on being the sole channel of advice to the political head; and he wanted experts in the Local Government Board, medical or otherwise, to advise the senior lay administrative staff and, through them but only through them, the President. This conflict was to bedevil the Ministry of Health's first years.[1]

The adverse effects of an internal division of this kind were first advanced and examined in Sir John Simon's English Sanitary Institutions, which was published in 1890. Simon was the most prominent medical man of his day active in the field of public health: he had been elected a Fellow of the Royal Society (though not, in fact, for his work in public health) at the early age of twenty-nine. He was medical officer successively to the General Board of Health, the Medical Department of the Privy Council, and the Local Government Board.[2] He had resigned disappointed and embittered from this last post, and these feelings added an edge to his published reflections.

1 See below chapter two, section four

2 Dictionary of National Biography 1901-11, p. 316

Simon asserted in his book that he found that he had exchanged the position in the forefront of policy-making that he had had at the Privy Council for one at the Board that was scarcely on its sidelines. English Sanitary Institutions went into a second edition in 1897, and had the greatest impact on a generation of doctors born about the time Simon transferred to the Local Government Board. One of these was Sir George Newman, a successor of Simon at the Local Government Board, who in 1919 became chief medical officer at the Ministry of Health.

Newman adopted Simon's interpretation of the evolution of public health policy as his own, and clung to it until his death in 1948. He welcomed the Board's creation but always claimed that its performance was fatally impaired in two crucial respects. First:

> 'Within it had been incorporated the old Poor Law Board and its administration of the former Poor Law, and though its inclusion was fit and proper the Board thus inherited a long-standing disability and stigma.'[1]

The second failing identified by Newman was that 'medicine was not, as under the Poor Law Commission given its full

1 Sir George Newman 'The Health of the People' in Harold J Laski, W Ivor Jennings and William A Robson (eds.) A Century of Municipal Progress 1835-1935 (London, 1935) p. 161

place and credit.'[1] Smellie also accepted this line. He concluded that:

> 'An internecine feud' broke out
> 'between the civil servants ....
> interested in Public Health, in which
> the latter were worsted.'[2]

Newman would not have dissented from this interpretation. His two-fold explanation, especially its second part, was an enduring private obsession that became to an extent self-fulfilling.[3] It had profound consequences for the early organisation of the Ministry of Health.

Newman's views were not products of his own direct experience. He had been a member of the Board's permanent staff only briefly (he became its chief medical officer in January 1919), though early in his career he had been friendly with - even a disciple of - Sir Arthur Newsholme, the Board's medical officer from 1908. Newman was appointed chief medical officer to the Board of Education in 1907 shortly before it acquired important new responsibilities in

1 loc. cit.

2 K B Smellie A Hundred Years of English Government (London, 1937), p. 248; Sidney and Beatrice Webb English Local Government viii: English Poor Law History (London, 1927), pp. 197-9 expresses similar opinions

3 See for example Sir George Newman The Building of a Nation's Health (London, 1939), pp. 22-28

respect of the health of schoolchildren. By comparison with his own department, the Local Government Board's medical staff could be made to appear timid and unadventurous: but it was through his uncritical acceptance of the Webbs' opinions that his own reflections were hardened and made dogmatic. He had been one of their associates for almost a decade before the First World War, and on his retirement from the civil service in 1935 he credited them with giving him his entry into it. Mrs Webb modestly replied that she had only:

> 'A vague remembrance of that little dinner, and the deep impression which you made on Arthur Balfour, (and) no notion that it had anything to do with your appointment some weeks afterwards.'[1]

The Webbs' interpretation of the performance of the Local Government Board had a deep and enduring influence on him.

Those who actually worked in the Board for some years, unlike Newman, drew different conclusions about their experiences. Sir Arthur MacNalty, who joined it in 1913 as a medical inspector, has claimed that:

> 'Medical subordination to lay direction was not so detrimental, as it might have been. The Medical Department of the Board preserved harmonious

1 Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, London, Newman Papers, 145: Beatrice Webb to Newman, 12 March 1935

> relations with the lay administrators, initiated measures of public health, and increased the sum of scientific and medical knowledge.'[1]

Certainly successive senior medical officials gained high scientific honours. Of the four medical officers of the Board between Simon's resignation in 1876 and Newsholme's appointment in 1908, three were elected Fellows of the Royal Society.[2] Experts in their respective fields of specialisation, the Board's medical department did good work under their leadership but 'quietly and without advertisement.'[3] Newsholme has noted the department's considerable reputation in medical circles for its epidemiological studies, thereby balancing the alleged deficiencies of the Registrar-General's Office.[4] Clearly lack of ostentation should not be confused with inactivity.

More than a decade after his retirement, Newsholme cavilled at the excessive and continuous work and the inadequacy of the medical department's staff in the Board's final years.

1 Sir Arthur S MacNalty, 'The History of State Medicine in England: the Medical Department of the Local Government Board' Journal of the Royal Institute of Public Health and Hygiene xi, 1 (1948), 9

2 Sir George Buchanan, Sir Richard Thorne Thorne and Sir William Power

3 MacNalty op. cit., p. 12

4 Sir Arthur Newsholme The Last Thirty Years in Public Health (London, 1936)

Few office heads do not make these complaints; but recent research has supported the case in so far as the Board as a whole is concerned.[1] Newsholme complained of 'the pertinacious cross-currents' that assailed the department during and at the end of the war:

> 'Which rendered it extremely difficult to obtain decisions in accordance with merit on important subjects or even to pursue necessary work.'[2]

He thought the Local Government Board 'an incomplete Ministry of Health.'[3]

The fragmentary and peculiarly partisan evidence makes confident assessment difficult. On the one hand, the historian is confronted with the possibly rose-tinted observations of former Board officials alienated by changes, both institutional and war-expedient; and, on the other, he has before him the stark assertions of civil servants and historians with no first-hand experience of the Board, inflamed by a distinctive parti pris. One thing is clear, and that is that neither side has provided as completely an accurate a picture as has been generally supposed.

1 Roy M Macleod 'Treasury Control and Social Administration' Occasional Papers in Social Administration xxiii (London, 1968)

2 Newsholme op. cit., p. 21

3 Sir Arthur Newsholme The Ministry of Health (London, 1925), title of chapter two

Nevertheless there can be no doubt even to less biased observers, both those writing at the time and since, that there was something awry at the Board. Many contemporaries agreed with Dr Addison when he wrote in 1919 that:

> 'It seemed to be an office which had failed to function. Looking back on my first three months there, I feel that it was rather as if I was punching a dough pudding. There was no machinery for securing that orders were followed or effected.'[1]

Fifty years later, even the Board's most sympathetic historian observed, leaning on expressions used by Simon, that:

> '(It) seemingly exhibited a penchant for "pedantry tempered by procrastination" and utter absorption in the art of "how not to do it".'[2]

According to Newsholme, a stanza current in 1908 declaimed:

> 'Said Sir Hugh, "In this case I confess
> Some reasons weigh more and some less;
> And the case being so
> We can hardly say 'No',
> Yet I hesitate much to say 'Yes'".'[3]

1 Bodleian Library, Addison Papers Box 12: Addison to the Prime Minister, 8 July 1919

2 Macleod op. cit., p. 8

3 Sir Arthur Newsholme The Last Thirty Years in Public Health (London, 1936), p. 48 (Sir Hugh Owen was the permanent secretary of the Board between 1882 and 1898)

These comments are said to characterise the Board's apparent slowness to respond to change, and the indecisiveness and pervarictions of the permanent staff.

It is now clear that responsibility for these characteristics should be attached not to its senior officials but to the Treasury and to the political constraints imposed on the Board by Parliament. The Treasury's rigid financial control was most prominent amongst these external limitations. It ensured that staff salaries were low and that they remained so. Even the President's reached £5,000 per annum - equivalent, that is, to a secretary of state - only in 1910. There were few directing higher division officials and a very large number of lower grade clerks. With this broad base and an apex not far above it, avenues of promotion were constricted, inhibiting interest, depressing ambition, and fostering conservatism 'in mind, method, and intent.'[1] It was not a department attractive to most graduate entrants to the civil service because of its low status, which in turn made it all the more vulnerable to the Treasury's constraints.

Most significant amidst the wider political considerations was the nature of the local government system, and especially

1 Macleod op. cit., p. 49

the principle of ultra vires, its foundation.[1] The constraints this imposed - and continues to impose - on local authorities are well known.[2] Equally significant was its effect on central government, concentrated as it was on the Board, the channel of communication between the two. The Board was obliged to police the actions of democratically elected authorities at a time when deference to the paramountcy of the localities was threatened by the self-generating growth of central government. The Board's officials were obliged to become two-faced. Upholding the traditional principle of local provision for local wants locally identified, they had also to encourage and sometimes to oblige local authorities to attain minimum standards determined by central government for the nation as a whole.

The Board's response was to develop techniques of influence which could be defended in Parliament: inspection, audit, loan sanction, control of private bills, and so on. These

1 This paragraph and the one following it draw heavily on E P Hennock 'Central/local government relations in England: an outline 1800-1950' Urban History Yearbook (Leicester, 1982), Clive Martlew 'The State and Local Government Finance' Public Administration lxi (1983), and on an unpublished paper on central-local relations 1871-1919 written by C A Bellamy. I am most grateful to Dr Bellamy for allowing me to read this stimulating essay, the research for which was funded by the Social Science Research Council.

2 The phrase ultra vires (beyond their powers) refers to the fact that local authorites may not act unless central government has previously sanctioned the particular action

accentuated the very red tape restrictions within the Board that so frustrated social reformers outside it. Amongst the Board's officials, lawyers and a legalistic bent of mind necessarily came to overshadow technical experts. The chief cause of the Board's defects as a power-house of social reform was thus the manner in which it was required to meet its obligations as part of the machinery of central government.

The inevitability of the Board's failure to meet demands for which it had not been designed went unnoticed by those who saw themselves as marching in the vanguard of social reform. For them the department's deficiencies were personified in the alleged inadequacies of its officials, and, after John Burns' appointment as President, of its political head. At first it was thought that the transfer of right-thinking officials would be the remedy, together with a drastic internal redesign. C F G Masterman, accepting the Board's parliamentary secretaryship in April 1908, asked Asquith for assurances, amongst which was this one:

> 'You will enquire into the possibility of internal reorganisation of the L G B with a view to making it more efficient: and, especially, whether (Sir Samuel Provis) can be got rid of at once, with a view to putting in

> someone from outside at the head with a drastic mandate for reform.'[1]

Increasingly a new department altogether was regarded as the only certain answer by those outside the Board who agreed with Masterman. The organisation of the Ministry of Health in its first months of existence reflected confidence in the view that right-minded individuals working together in a new department would activate administration of the Board's responsibilities. This optimism was especially prominent amongst officials of the National Health Insurance Commission for England; and it is to the Insurance Commissions that we now turn.

1 Lucy Masterman C F G Masterman (London, 1939), p. 105 (Sir Samuel Provis was the Board's permanent secretary from 1849 until his retirement in 1910)

3. THE NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE COMMISSIONS

The National Health Insurance Commissions were formed in 1911 for the express and exclusive purpose of overseeing the operation of the National Insurance Act. There were four of them: one each for England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. They were not equal in size or significance: on the contrary, the English Commission was by far the most important. It had the largest number of officials, and its directing bureaucrat was a former permanent secretary at the Board of Education of some notoriety, Sir Robert Morant. Moreover its physical proximity to Parliament made it a natural focus for the 1911 Act's administration. Morant's appointment as Chairman of the Commissions' co-ordinating Joint Committee reflected the higher status of the English Commission.

The Commissions were unique amongst their contemporary government departments. Described as 'intermediate', they were inferior in bureaucratic status even to the Local Government Board. In fact this mattered little as the political importance of the legislation for which they were responsible at least balanced their formal insignificance. Their uniqueness lay in the fact that their single purpose was to administer one act of Parliament, and one describing a newly admitted area of state responsiblity. Other government departments were concerned with a body of legislation.

The Local Government Board with its multitude of duties and concerns was an extreme example of the general type. The anomalous position of the National Health Insurance Commissions encouraged both those who worked in them and those who did not to regard bureaucratic activities there as being quite different from those of other departments of state.

Unusually for a government department, they were designed as forums for achieving and resolving the diverse ambitions of interest groups. In addition to their permanent staffs, each Commission was made up of representatives of the various groups involved in the implementation of the health insurance scheme: the trade unions, the friendly societies, and the medical profession. Lay consumers were conspicuously absent. One commissioner had to be a woman. The National Health Insurance Joint Committee, composed of the four Commissions' chairmen and some outside members, provided the formal means of co-ordination. These distinctive features encouraged many observers to regard the Commissions as unconventional and, for some of them, another justification for antipathy to their creator, Lloyd George, on the grounds that he sought to use them to strengthen his political powerbase.

The Chairman of the English Commission was a member of the government regarded as the minister in charge of health insurance: strangely the title did not in fact exist. The first politician to hold the position was C F G Masterman, who at the time of his appointment was Financial Secretary to the Treasury. Initially he was outside the Cabinet, entering it only in February 1914 on becoming Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. His promotion was short-lived. He promptly lost his seat in the mandatory by-election and left the Cabinet in February 1915, being succeeded by Edwin Montagu.

Masterman's inferiority in the political hierarchy was exaggerated by ill-health; but his absences from the office and his stimulating leadership when present encouraged irreverence and iconoclasm in the youthful civil servants attracted there. A junior official thought him 'young, ardent, idealistic.'[1] Masterman did not allow himself to be intimidated by his Vice-Chairman who had gained a reputation whilst permanent secretary at the Board of Education as a powerful official. Lucy Masterman has recorded that her husband 'had a great admiration' for Morant.[2] Masterman himself was in no doubt as to the

1 Lord Salter Memoirs of a Public Servant (London, 1961), p. 62

2 Lucy Masterman C F G Masterman (London, 1939), p. 220

strength of Morant's character: "I think he would have been an invaluable public servant in a Bolshevik state, in which the command had gone forth .... that all things should be made new."[1]

On Morant's side there was affection for his political head: 'he liked and worked well (with Masterman) and the two men became friends even though they were not always in agreement.'[2] Mrs Masterman gives an example. She was present at a meeting during the course of which Morant 'made a persistent push in the direction of incorporating the County Councils, to be met by a steady "stonewalling" on the point by Masterman.'[3] Later they disagreed over Morant's proposal to take maternity benefit away from the Commissions and to restore it to the Local Government Board. Masterman argued that the Commissioners could not afford to lose so popular a part of their responsibilities, and that as the local authorities were hostile to the 1911 Act as the product of an unsympathetic government, they could not be trusted to administer the benefit properly. Clashes of opinion between the permanent and the political heads, deliberately never disguised on Morant's side, excited the work of the Commissions' officials.

1 ibid., p. 232

2 Violet Markham 'Sir Robert Morant: Some Personal Reminiscences' Public Administration xxviii (1950), 253

3 Masterman op. cit., p. 220

Lloyd George's announcement in November 1911 that the Insurance Commissions were shortly to be set up stimulated much hostile parliamentary criticism on the grounds of patronage. He appeased it with promises which he subsequently pressed on Morant.

> '(In the Commons) I gave a specific undertaking that the appointments shall "avoid a political character and shall not be dominated by the Government of the day"; also that the officials "will be appointed, not by the Government but by the Commissions, and on their responsibility".'[1]

Parliamentary approval had been obtained for appointments 'from "among men who understand the work and have experience in these matters",' and for some of these to come from outside the civil service.[2]

Morant was urged to be aware that:

> 'It would be well that the Insurance Commission should make use of the Civil Service Commission in every possible way for selecting candidates ... to secure absolute impartiality and the avoidance of even the appearance of unsuitable influences.'[3]

1 PRO, MH 78/53: D Lloyd George to Sir Robert Morant, n.d.

2 loc. cit.

3 loc. cit.

Morant agreed 'to secure that a well qualified staff should be selected with the utmost expedition, without delay, and entirely free from unworthy or unsuitable influences of any kind.'[1]

These exchanges are explained by their political context. There had been considerable parliamentary comment about ministerial patronage and the personal selection by ministers of their official staff. It was felt that this watered down the principles of open competition established a generation before by acceptance of the Northcote-Trevelyan Report. The Royal Commission on the Civil Service, chaired by Lord MacDonnell when it was appointed in 1912 and subsequently by Sir Henry Babington Smith, reflected these concerns especially in its fourth and sixth reports.[2]

Lloyd George's injunction did not prevent Morant from hand-picking his colleagues himself. He believed as strongly that the essence of reform was to create the right machine as in the importance of selecting officials who seemed to him best suited to the task. He placed great faith in the members of those of his staff whom he regarded as forming an

1 PRO, MH 78/53: Sir Robert L Morant to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, 14 December 1911

2 Royal Commission on the Civil Service, fourth report (Cd. 7338): Parl Papers 1914, xvi, 1; sixth report (Cd. 7832): Parl Papers 1914-16, xii. 1

intellectual aristocracy and, one of them has claimed, "put almost no limits on the powers he was prepared to give them."

> "His root idea was always that if you can create the right machinery and pick the right type of men to work it, they will do what you want without needing elaborate detailed instructions."[1]

'Other departments were called upon to yield up some of their best brains.'[2] Morant tried to sugar the pill. He wrote in characteristic vein to all government departments.

> 'I need hardly add that the commission are most anxious to avoid "poaching" in any sense on other Government Offices, and on the other hand that we are only able to consider the appointment of really good men. We have reason to suppose, however, that in some offices circumstances have produced a block of promotion, so that really good men appear to be prevented by accident from obtaining promotion for some time and may be glad to avail themselves of this opportunity if their Office could spare them.'[3]

1 Markham op. cit., p. 258 (The comment comes from a letter written to Miss Markham by Sir Laurence Brock)

2 ibid., p. 253

3 PRO, MH 78/55: Sir Robert L Morant to the permanent secretaries of Home Civil Service Departments

The corps d'elite thus gained included John Anderson, L G Brock, M L Gwyer, E J Strohmenger, and S P Vivian, all of whom were to accompany Morant to the Ministry of Health; a future head of the civil service, Warren Fisher; A W Watson, the Government Actuary between 1917 and 1936; G M Young, H N Bunbury, and George Schuster from the Lord Chancellor's office - in Morant's words, "the Mendicity (sic) Bureau."[1]

The English Commission 'was indeed a ministry of all talents,' thought one of its members;[2] 'the most talented body of civil servants who had ever up to that date been concentrated on a single task,' recalled another contentedly.[3] That task 'gave greater opportunity of constructive and rewarding work than the Civil Service had ever before had.'[4] It was 'the greatest constructive task a British administration had ever up to that time undertaken.'[5]

The attractions of the Commission were considerable no doubt, but the detractions of work elsewhere in the service for

1 Markham op. cit., p. 254

2 R W Harris Not so Humdrum (London, 1939), p. 170

3 Lord Salter op. cit., p. 58

4 Arthur Salter Slave of the Lamp (London, 1967) p.5

5 Lord Salter op. cit., p. 51

these talented if self-regarding young officials were also a powerful stimulus of enthusiasm for the department they now joined. A small band of loyal followers collected around Morant precisely because his personality seemed to them as a beacon amidst the dim lights of his Whitehall colleagues. Morant repaid their fidelity with an almost paternal guardianship. He was heard to describe three of his young adherents as "my Brock, my Salter, my Vivian."[1] The last of these was known in Whitehall as "Morant's little Sylvester."[2]

On the face of it, there seems little in the central administration of the health insurance scheme to stimulate even minds numbed, as was Salter's by his own account, by the tedious routine of quieter departments. That they were so enthusiastic in their new work is likely to have been less a consequence of its intrinsic interest that the product of circumstances. 'The spur of urgent necessity and the opportunity of seeing directly what, and with whom, he was directing' were high attractions to Morant's corps d'elite.[3] The political controversy which greeted the

1 Markham op. cit., p. 257

2 José Harris 'Bureaucrats and Businessmen in British Food Control, 1916-19' in Kathleen Burk (ed.) War and the State (London, 1982), p. 151

3 Arthur Salter op. cit., p. 278

scheme's launching was also an important ingredient in generating excitement.

A new generation of civil servants, of whom a few had been interested or active in university settlements in London or elsewhere as had Morant some years before them, had been disillusioned swiftly by their early experience of the civil service. They regarded it as the quintessence of bureaucratic impotence. Moreover being collected together in one office fostered a joie de vivre that to jaded outsiders seemed often arrogant and to historians occasionally frivolous. Harris remembered 'an animated competition (between three civil servants) ... the aim being to make a complete circuit of Morant's room without touching the floor.'[1]

The dour officials of the Local Government Board did not have opportunities to indulge in frivolities of this sort. Evidently the relative absence of work for the Commission in the peace-time years after the scheme's introduction idled the minds and hands of this confident corps of young Turks. Many of its members were quickly taken into the war-expedient departments once they were set up, indicating their ability, no doubt, but also the immediate expendability of their work at the Commissions. Some evidence has survived to indicate

1 R W Harris op. cit., p. 147

how they occupied their time whilst responsible for the insurance scheme. Planning the future was a popular pastime. Sir George Newman's daybooks reveal that he and Morant together with other members of the English Commission's staff often discussed the shape of public health policies of the future.[1] These civil servants acted as an unofficial 'think tank' for issues in the post-war world that ranged far beyond their immediate concern for the health insurance scheme. Their feeling of isolation from the centre of the government machine is well expressed in Morant's comment: 'We here can get no inkling of what is being discussed or settled.'[2] The Haldane Committee allowed their most articulate member to set down his views on the structure of a government department that would most effectively implement the plans he and his colleagues had evolved for public health, plans that neither the principle of insurance nor the Commissions gave them opportunity to effect. In this way we can see that the intellectual milieu of the National Health Insurance Commissions, carefully fostered by Morant and encouraged by circumstances, provided conditions of which the Haldane Report was a natural growth.

1 Department of Health and Social Security, Alexander Fleming House, London: Sir George Newman Daybooks, passim but especially entries dated 2 May and 6 June 1918 in which Newman notes conversations with Addison, Morant, and Heseltine and with Morant on the need for a Ministry of Health (his daybooks first mention a discussion on this topic on 18 February 1908: 'Long chat with Morant on Ministry of Health 5-6.30 p.m.')

2 Bodleian Library, Addison Papers Box 12: Morant to Addison, 25 April 1914

4. THE REPORT OF THE MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE, 1918

The Machinery of Government Committee was an enquiry 'into the responsibilities of the various Departments of the central executive Government;' and it was asked 'to advise in what manner the exercise and distribution by the Government of its functions should be improved.'[1] It was set up in July 1917 as a sub-committee of the Reconstruction Committee and became a departmental committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction when it was formed later in the year. Its report was submitted to Dr Addison, the Minister of Reconstruction, in December 1918.

The committee had a membership of seven. Three were MPs, none of whom played significant parts in the enquiry: Edwin Montagu, who became Secretary of State for India in July 1917 and was thus absent for much of the time during which the committee was at work; Sir Alan Sykes, who was appointed in November 1917 and in effect replaced Montagu; and J H Thomas. The most active participants were Sir George Murray, a recently retired permanent secretary of the Treasury; Sir Robert Morant, the Vice-Chairman of the National Health

1 Report of the Machinery of Government Committee (Cd. 9230): Parl. Papers 1918, xii. 1 (It is usually known as the Haldane Report after the committee's chairman, Lord Haldane of Cloan)

Insurance Commission for England; Beatrice Webb; and the chairman of the committee, Viscount Haldane of Cloan. The report was thus very much the work of practitioners and theorists of administration. The politicians made little impact on it.

Morant and Mrs Webb stand out amongst their colleagues. They had already been involved in reforms or enquiries that allowed them to express views that this committee gave new opportunities to elaborate and to expand. Haldane's contribution was also important. A central feature of the army reforms of 1912, which he had promoted whilst Secretary of State for War, had been the separation of responsibility as between those who devised strategy and those who effected it. Beatrice Webb, one of the authors of the Minority Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, had argued in that report for a redivision of responsibilities amongst government departments on functional lines. These ideas reappeared in the Haldane Report.

The committee divided its report into two parts. Its signatories explained that:

> 'We have endeavoured to define in the first place the general principles which should govern the distribution of the responsibilities in question, and in the second place to illustrate the

> application of those principles in sufficient outline.'[1]

The first part accordingly asserts a functionalist principle; namely that government departments should be organised according to the services to be performed. It was thought that 'the business of Government would fall into one or other of the following main divisions:' finance, national defence, education, health, and justice.[2] The second part of the report discussed the implementation and the practice of this principle. Chapter nine described 'the further concentration of health services under a Minister of Health, who should be charged with the general surveillance of all matters relating to health.'[3]

The first part of the committee's report closely followed the arguments of Beatrice Webb's Minority Report of 1909. This had proposed inter alia that the boards of guardians should be abolished, and that their duties should be transferred to county and county borough councils. Committees would be created under each council's authority, one for each category of service provided. Four committees were cited as examples, dealing with education, health, asylums, and pensions.

1 ibid., p. 4

2 ibid., p. 16

3 ibid., p. 58

Each committee would receive grants-in-aid for the particular service it provided from a single government department, or from a part of one. The Board of Education would be the central authority for the county and county boroughs' education committees. Health would be the responsiblity of 'a separately organised and self-contained Public Health Department, whether this is organised as a separate Division of the Local Government Board or made a distinct Department.'[1]

The influence of Lord Haldane is clear in the comparison drawn between civil administration and that of the armed forces. Elsewhere in the report similarity is implied between the functions of a military general staff and of those in government departments concerned with the formulation of policy. Just as staff officers examine intelligence reports before devising and implementing strategy, so it was argued that senior civil servants have a 'duty of investigation and thought, as preliminary to action.'[2] This concept was to be implemented in the organisation of the Ministry of Health in 1919.

1 Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress (Cd. 4499): Parl. Papers 1909, xxxvii. 1253

2 Report of the Machinery of Government Committee (Cd. 9230): Parl. Papers 1918, xii. 6

The report underlined the importance of research and information time and time again. Not only did it recommend the creation of a department to conduct 'the necessary research and enquiry' for central government as a whole but also 'that in all Departments better provision should be made for enquiry, research, and reflection before policy is defined and put into operation.'[1] The report instanced the Local Government Board's intelligence branch and the Board of Education's office of special inquiries and reports as prototypes of that provision. It asserted that the latter, of which Morant had been appointed assistant director on its formation in 1895, had been:

> 'Instrumental in diagnosing fresh educational needs in advance, and in exploring all possible means of assisting, as part of the Board, in devising and applying new methods of meeting such needs.'[2]

It was particularly important, the report continued, that the right appointments should be made to these posts, and that the officials holding them should be allowed ample opportunity to plan for the future. They must not be swamped by the humdrum work which the report imagined was traditionally required of civil servants.

1 loc. cit.

2 loc. cit.

> 'We urge strongly .... that special attention be paid to the methods of recruiting the personnel to be employed upon such work; and .... that in all Departments the higher officials in charge of administration should have more time to devote to this portion of their duties.'[1]

They were to be helped to do so by two changes in particular in the structure and in the operations of a department as traditionally organised. The report suggested that intradepartmental meetings such as had been held in the Board of Trade, at which the political heads and principal officials met to discuss policies, should become standard practice in all departments. It was believed that meetings such as these would co-ordinate and cross-fertilise thinking that would otherwise remain locked within departmental sub-divisions.

The second change advocated by the report had to do with ministers' need to secure and to retain public confidence in their administrative decisions. They would do so only if:

> 'It is recognised as an obligation upon Departments to avail themselves of the advice and assistance of advisory bodies so constituted as to make available the knowledge and experience

1 loc. cit.

> of all sections of the community affected by the activities of the Department.'[1]

The report distinguished between advisory bodies set up by statutory authority and by ministerial discretion without clearly preferring one to the other. It listed three in the first category: the Consultative Council of the Board of Education, the Advisory Committee on Health Insurance, and the Advisory Council of the Scottish Education Department; and in the second category the Consumers' Council of the Ministry of Food, and the Advisory Council attached to the Department of Industry and Commerce at the Board of Trade. It was believed that popular support derived not from political legitimacy but from scientific modernity.

Commentators concentrating on the second part of the report, have claimed that 'the Haldane Committee had little immediate impact.'[2] It may have had 'a breath-taking mandate, a splendid career, and a luciferous afterlife'[3] but, so it is argued, it changed the machinery of government scarcely at all. There is truth in this criticism. The committee's ten-fold division of departmental functions was not

1 ibid., p. 11

2 Richard A Chapman and J R Greenaway The Dynamics of Administrative Reform (London, 1980) p. 82

3 Paul Barton Johnson Land Fit for Heroes (Chicago, 1968) p. 43

implemented tout court. This might have been predicted: after all the report was deliberately high-minded and eschewed the instantly practicable. Though the Ministries of Defence, Employment, Supply, and Health were all subsequent creations, they owed their existence to contingent factors and not to immediate acceptance of the general principles advanced in the report's first part.

Moreover a counter-offensive was mounted which indicated widespread hostility to these principles within the civil service. Though criticism of this kind was not as coherently articulated as the arguments of the report itself, it was no less effective in its impact. Generally it remained implicit, a series of adverse responses many of which cannot now be detected for, unlike the Haldane Report, most left no documentary record. One example stands out. The Report of the Committee on the Amalgamation of Services Common to the Navy, Army, and Air Force observed that:

> '(There is) a noticeable tendency of administrative theory of the present day .... to suppose that a re-organisation of the Departments of Government, by which one Department shall undertake all work of a particular nature for the whole Government Services, which will make for economy. The view we have taken on this point is that each case must be

> considered on its merits and not merely on only a priori theory.'[1]

This was a reassertion of the putative advantages of the existing division of labour between departments which was largely the product of accident - precisely the historical development Haldane and his colleagues sought to undermine.

A second criticism was that the Haldane Report almost entirely disregarded the party political and the parliamentary elements that are essential ingredients in the business of governments in a representative democracy. The need to ensure the ascendancy of the party in Parliament was ommitted from the list of the main functions of the Cabinet. Its role in holding the party together and in satisfying its supporters' legitimate ambitions was also ignored. The report had an elevated appreciation of the operation of the political process, imagining that the electorate would support only those policies that it found intellectually credible. The committee had too limited an understanding of the responsiblities of government departments, interpreting their activities narrowly as being composed merely of statutory duties.

1 Report of the Committee on the Amalgamation of Services Common to the Navy, Army, and Air Force (Cmd. 2649): Parl. Papers 1926, viii. 209

The parliamentarians on the committee might have corrected these distortions had they been active participants. As it was, the agreeable atmosphere of the chairman's comfortable dining room, in which the committee met, was a disincentive to full and detailed discussion of the sordid mechanics of the political process. It was distant from the war and from the world outside. As Mrs Webb recorded:

> 'It is a pleasant sport. We sit twice a week over tea and muffins .... discussing the theory and practice of government. I tell them that I am discovering the land of Whitehall for the future Labour Cabinet.'[1]

The Haldane Committee's part in the education of Mrs Webb has been one of its least appreciated qualities.

A third and fundamental criticism of the report is made by Wilson.

> 'What I object to is the attempt to treat efficiency as if it were a value, like a number, which is morally and politically indifferent.'[2]

Whilst it was right to insist that politicians and administrators should think before they acted, the report was foolish to imagine that their thinking could be politically

1 Margaret I Cole (ed.) Beatrice Webb's Diaries 1912-1924 (London, 1952), p. 98

2 C H Wilson Haldane and the Machinery of Government (London, 1957), p. 10

neutral. It must inevitably be coloured by the prejudices of those who did the thinking and by the objects of their thoughts. In consequence the idea of a Cabinet acting as the Goverment's 'think tank' whilst the departments of state implemented its policies was misconceived. Administration and policy walk hand-in-hand: the one influences the other.

It was nevertheless in its emphasis on the 'duty of investigation and thought, as preliminary to action' that the report had its deepest effect, little observed by historians. It is most noticeable in the structure and the organisation of the Ministry of Health, whose first permanent secretary, Sir Robert Morant, had been one of the four most active members of the committee. The report had argued that government departments ought to make better provision 'for enquiry, research, and reflection,' and suggested three ways of improving departments' facilities in this respect. First: that intelligence branches should be created, staffed by specially selected personnel. Second: that principal officials in each department ought to spend more time on the identification and the meeting of needs within their areas of responsibility. Third: that advisory bodies ought to be set up so as to bring officials directly into contact with representatives 'of all sections of the community affected by the activities of the department.'

Whilst Morant was the Ministry of Health's permanent secretary, all three elements in the committee's scheme of 'better provision' were in evidence, if but nascently. First: the need for advisory bodies, which the department called consultative councils, was recognised by the Ministry of Health Act. Ultimately five came into existence. Second: Morant divided the permanent secretary's duties in two. Morant, as the First Secretary, spent the greater part of his time considering high policy; and the Second Secretary, his deputy, dealt chiefly with other and lesser matters. Put crudely, the First Secretary was concerned chiefly with the future and his deputy with the present. Third: the intelligence branch of the Local Government Board was continued and strengthened in the new department. Furthermore the Registrar-General's Office was brought into close contact with the Ministry of Health for it was hoped that such a relationship would provide its officials with immediate access to the epidemiological studies thought to be one of the essential foundations for the health policies of the future. These developments, clearly imprints of the Haldane Report, are explored in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2

THE CHANGING STRUCTURE OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH

1. Introduction

2. Sir Robert Morant

3. A Department Envisaged

4. The Medical and the Lay Administrative Classes

5. The Ministry and its Officials after 1920

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins by describing a particular set of expectations about a department of health, and ends with an analysis of their development. Their most active exponent was Sir Robert Morant, the Ministry's first permanent secretary. He exercised a formative influence on the organisation of the department on its creation, and he played a leading part in attempting to shape the Ministry in conformity with the views of administrative functionalists. Though he died little less than a year after the department came into being, those few of his ideas that were implemented lived on. One of them endures still. As he intended, the Medical Research Council continues to be independent both of local authorities and of government departments.

Yet if this component of his scheme was long lasting, the wider framework, never properly established, was not. Most of the officials working in the department in the 1920s and 1930s would not have countenanced Morant's views. In none of them was this lack of sympathy more marked than Sir Arthur Robinson, Morant's immediate successor as permanent secretary. These two men were quite different both in temperament and in official outlook. Morant corresponds closely to the 'zealots' and 'stormy reformers' of the

Victorian civil service; Robinson, on the other hand, has many of the characteristics of the 'mandarin stereotype' associated with the senior civil service in modern Britain.[1] The contrast between the Ministry of Health of 1919/20 and the same department a decade later is well revealed in these terms.

Poverty of documentation makes even this unsophisticated analysis an arduous one. Indeed Robinson's reluctance to commit to paper his thinking about administration contrasts strikingly and significantly with Morant's readiness to do so. The latter's obituary declared inaccurately but elegiacally that:

> 'His official life was an essay in the philosophy of the public service; he did not write it, he seldom expounded it, but he practised it, and what he did will last.'[2]

Though he left no papers of his own, Morant's colleagues and contemporaries have provided ample record of his achievements, if a mythopoeic one.

1 H Parris Constitutional Bureaucracy (London, 1969), chapter 5

2 The Times 13 March 1920

The same cannot be said of Robinson. 'That great man,' 'a calm man in the centre of the various storms which blew,' was renowned for being 'shy and reserved' and for 'a power of terse and logical expression' made the more powerful by its economy.[1] He 'must be considered one of the most successful administrators of his generation,' but he achieved his success by resourceful use of accepted canons of official behaviour not, as did Morant, in occasional deliberate subterfuge.[2]

This chapter deals prominently with individuals but it is not exclusively concerned with them. The context - the political and bureaucratic culture in which these officials worked - is of cardinal significance. If the Ministry of Health of the interwar years worked in ways from many of which Morant had sought to depart, it did so because of a widespread and overwhelming indifference to the ideals he espoused. This chapter describes his ambitions for the new department, examines efforts to implement them, and accounts for the counter-reaction.

1 Sir Martin Flett in a letter to the author, 19 October 1981; Sir Antony Part in a letter to the author, 7 March 1983; Dictionary of National Biography 1941-1950, p. 729

2 Dictionary of National Biography 1941-1950, p. 729 (Robinson's biographical details are given below, section five)

2. SIR ROBERT MORANT

The Ministry of Health and its organisation in its early years cannot be fully comprehended without an assessment of Morant. As we have seen, he was no stranger to the responsibilities with which he was to be concerned at the new department. He had been the driving force on the official side of the National Health Insurance Commission for England, the Commission becoming not merely a part of the Ministry of Health but to an extent its institutional prototype. In some respects both departments embodied concepts first expressed in coherent and extended form in the Report of the Machinery of Government Committee, of which Morant had been a member; and if they bore one man's imprint, it was his.[1]

Morant is now regarded as one of the outstanding civil servants of his generation. Though he has been well served by the reminiscences of his longer living contemporaries, this pre-eminence emerged even during his lifetime. He was regarded as out of the ordinary: by his friends as a metaphorical as well as a literal giant, the purveyor if not the originator of new and envigorating notions of bureaucratic organisation; and by those less sympathetic to him and to his ideals as a domineering figure whose 'lack of

1 See above chapter one, section four

experience in official life renders him quite insensible to the umbrage his methods excite.'[1] We must first account for the prominence of this senior civil servant.

Robert Laurie Morant had been born in 1863. His father had died before his son reached his tenth birthday. Educated at Winchester despite the family's straitened financial circumstances, Morant had thought to take holy orders on leaving school but instead went up to New College, Oxford to read theology. He gained a first class degree in the subject in 1885. He never quite flung off his religious mien. Lucy Masterman had 'a very vivid recollection of his curiously episcopal appearance.'[2] Violet Markham thought Morant's 'target was in the sky: not on earth.'[3] Sir Henry Bunbury gave his review in the journal Public Administration of B M Allen's biography the title 'Elijah in Whitehall.'[4]

His methods as a civil servant have traditionally been attributed to his absorption of 'some of the traditions of court intrigue in Bangkok during the seven years he spent in

1 Sir Almeric Fitzroy Memoirs (London, 1925), i. 231

2 Lucy Masterman C F G Masterman (London, 1939) p. 220

3 Violet Markham 'Sir Robert Morant: Some Personal Reminiscences' Public Administration xxviii (1950), 250

4 B M Allen Robert Morant (London, 1934)

Siam as tutor to the royal children.'[1] Ironically he was to fall foul of it in the end. One of Morant's colleagues at the Board of Education, Sir Amherst Selby-Bigge, has written that:

> 'He exercised great and independent influence and became the object of much jealousy, which led to his retirement from the Siamese service in 1894.'[2]

A recent study of this period of his life takes issue with this received opinion. It suggests that the impression Morant gave to his friends of his experiences in Siam was a partial one, the effect if not the intent of which was essentially self-justification.[3] Morant's own description of the slights he endured at the hands of his royal employers and his eventual dismissal by them has been accepted hitherto only in the absence of an alternative account; and his reputation has benefited from a premature death that could be elevated to tragic status and alleged to have robbed him of a final personal triumph.[4]

1 Lord Salter Memoirs of a Public Servant (London, 1961) p. 57

2 Dictionary of National Biography 1912-21, p. 386

3 Neil Daglish 'The Morant-Chulalongkorn Affair of 1893-94' Journal of Educational Administration and History (Leeds, 1983)

4 This is the line taken by Sir George Newman The Building of a Nation's Health (London, 1939), chapter 14

Morant's characteristics as a civil servant stemmed not so much from his 'lack of experience in official life' as from his career's unusual profile. He had joined the Education Department in 1895 not as an ordinary graduate entrant to the first division (now called the administrative class) but as the assistant director of its office of special inquiries and reports. He was in his thirty-second year and thus ten years his fellow entrants' senior. On his return to Britain from Siam, he had briefly worked at Toynbee Hall as its censor of studies. This was remarkable in itself, for it was most unusual for civil servants of his generation to preface their official careers with so long a period of work outside the government service.

Little more than seven years later, he was the department's senior official. This was rapid promotion. It was achieved in a way which, if not unique, was certainly unconventional. Morant had been moved after four years from his work on special inquiries to become private secretary to the Vice-President, and then, at the beginning of 1902, to the President. At the end of the year he was appointed the department's acting secretary, and the position was confirmed when Sir George Kekewich retired the following April. This soaring ascent through the departmental hierarchy, made from foundations untypical even of high flying civil servants, and lacking the experience of humdrum departmental work, shaped Morant's attitudes and outlook.

As a private secretary, and then as a permanent secretary, Morant gained a bird's eye view of the department's activities and an understanding of policy only at its most rarified levels. He achieved his high position without ever experiencing at first hand or learning to circumvent the often dull routine of mundane departmental administration. In later life he showed himself to be unsympathetic to officials whose work immersed them in administrative chores essential to high policy but with what he would have regarded as little obvious bearing on it. One observer described his attitude within the office as that '<u>sic volo sic jubeo</u> air.'[1]

This lack of sympathy was to be especially marked in Morant's dealings with Local Government Board officials. He spoke of them as being 'steeped in rotten traditions and methods' and instructed one of his junior colleagues 'to stand no nonsense from (them).'[2] Morant's intolerance ensured that the transition from Board to Ministry was achieved at the cost of some of the Board's officials' goodwill. The Commissions' officials allegedly 'looked upon the Local Government Board men as hopelessly Victorian, prepared to die in the last

1 Fitzroy op. cit., p. 231

2 R W Harris <u>Not So Humdrum</u> (London, 1939), p. 203

rut.'[1] Those of the Board were said to have 'regarded the newcomers as upstarts who were beyond redemption.'[2] Morant wrote gleefully to Addison:

> 'I found Munro in a hopeless condition, groaning at being asked for mema. on how to spend large sums that he has no idea how to spend and doesn't want to have to spend! Heigh-ho!'[3]

Morant's opinions and prejudices elude the usual labels. His was an unusual combination of several facets of the official mind, and one that defies the convenience of the historian's categories. He was both the subject specialist with a knowledge that rivalled the specialists and the splitter of hairs with the keenest of eyes for minutiae. He could rise above the inhibitions of an official's concern for administrative practicality and extoll the merits of a policy in its most far-reaching and idealistic sense; and he could outdo the departmental pedants in their pedantry. This made him a difficult but exhilerating - because unpredictable - colleague.

1 loc. cit.

2 loc. cit.

3 Bodleian Library, Addison Papers Box 12: Morant to Addison, Monday 6 p.m. (27 April 1919) (Sir Horace Munro was the permanent secretary of the Local Government Board, to which Morant was attached at this time)

Masterman recalled that Morant "combined .... attention to detail with adherence to, and effort towards, large and startling ideas."[1] Harris, who worked closely with him both at the English Insurance Commission and at the Ministry of Health, had heard it said of him that 'in the course of a short hour or so' Morant might urge the Prime Minister to sack a member of his Cabinet and then give a boy clerk 'a severe wigging because he was not using the right sort of nib.'[2] He could clearly plot the shape of woods when others could only gaze mournfully at trees; yet - and often unexpectedly - he could also concentrate on the trees with an obsessive attention that amazed his colleagues. His was exactly the character to attract youthful adherents who felt themselves unappreciated in other parts of the service and knew themselves, sometimes rightly, to be worthy of more demanding duties.

To his friends, Morant had an 'over-subtle mind.'[3] L G Brock, a junior colleague, recalled that:

> "He gave himself and us endless
> trouble in guarding against subtleties

1 Lucy Masterman C F G Masterman (London, 1939), p. 232 (Masterman was the Chairman of the English Insurance Commission)

2 R W Harris op. cit., p. 152

3 Violet Markham Friendship's Harvest (London, 1956) p. 202

> which were not there and merely what psychologists call the projection of his own mind."[1]

He had a reputation for seeing difficulties where to others none existed. He warned Sir Almeric Fitzroy, the secretary to the Privy Council, that:

> 'The shortcomings and complications of the (Insurance) Act rendered the administration of Maternity Benefit "almost insoluble".'

Fitzroy found that 'it proved, by general consent, the easiest part of the Act to administer.'[2]

These characteristics were natural outgrowths of the intensity with which he pursued his career. 'He lived entirely for his work (and) never thought or spared himself in (it).'[3] A sense of perspective seemed often to be subsidiary to action. It ended not with the departmental day but preceded and extended beyond the usual office hours. He had 'volcanic energy.'[4] Weekends would be sacrificed to discussions of official business with intimates. Moon-lit walks would be devoted to the romance of departmental

1 loc. cit.

2 Masterman, op. cit., p. 249

3 ibid., p. 232

4 Dictionary of National Biography 1912-21, p. 287

re-organisations.[1] Zoë Puxley, a close colleague, claimed to have received a letter from her permanent secretary dated without a hint of self-consciousness "Monday midnight."[2] Morant wrote to Addison about the setting up of the Medical Research Committee on 'Thursday midnight,' signing his letter 'goodnight, yours ever.'[3]

The historian coming long after catches a glimpse of Morant's relentless energy in that hurried script of his that often climbs around the edges of a page until all the available space is filled. His contemporaries reacted sharply: 'he attracted equally furious hatred and affections.'[4] Depending on the eyes of the beholder, his drive was worthy either of admiration in its disinterestedness or of condemnation in its determined self-advancement. His motives, or the motives imputed to him, were often as important in determining reactions as his activities themselves. Morant's deliberately adversarial approach to problems ensured that the responses of those with whom he had dealings were not only decisive but long lasting. He thought

1 Department of Health and Social Security, Alexander Fleming House, London: Sir George Newman Daybooks, entry dated 2 February 1912

2 Markham op. cit., p. 204

3 Bodleian Library, Addison Papers Box 3: Morant to Addison, nd

4 Masterman op. cit., p. 232

it ridiculous to obscure differences of opinion and 'believed that there was nothing for it but to fight it out and let the best man and the best principle win.'[1]

Morant explained his attitude succinctly in a memorandum to Lloyd George.

> "In all great questions of social importance, there must be different trends of thought and purpose, to be brought together by the clash of discussion into the best obtainable resultant."[2]

The dialectical approach would have been a satisfactory one had Morant been able to restrain himself, but he could not. 'He was contemptuous of mental processes other than his own, and he took little trouble, if indeed he had the power, to conceal his views.'[3] Masterman said: "His great weakness was his inability to deal with fools."[4] Markham thought he hated them: he believed them anti-social and that they ought to be destroyed. Those who did not agree with him would find themselves confronting the most violent criticisms and their

1 Markham op. cit., p. 194

2 Violet Markham 'Sir Robert Morant: Some Personal Reminiscences' Public Administration xxviii (1950), 253-4

3 Violet Markham Friendship's Harvest (London, 1956), p. 191

4 Violet Markham 'Sir Robert Morant: Some Personal Reminiscences' Public Administration xxviii (1950), 256

motives impugned. 'He would rail fiercely at what he called "the beasts" who had no appreciation of first principles and would wreck a plan for the general good.'[1] He could not have been described, as was Sir Arthur Robinson, as 'a calm man in the centre of the various storms which blew.'[2] Morant was a vortex, not a mill-pond.

If Morant propagated his views with vigour, the ideas that animated them remain elusive to the historian. Brock has offered an explanation.

> 'Morant himself had neither the time nor the inclination to reduce his ideas to paper; indeed he had an instinctive dislike of doing so. Most people find it necessary to write in order to reduce their ideas to a logical and coherent form; Morant hated letting his ideas crystalise.'[3]

Some crystals have survived nevertheless. Four small pages of pencilled, undated notes in Morant's hand have been preserved in Dr Addison's papers.[4] Each has a separate

1 ibid., 254

2 Sir Antony Part in a letter to the author, 7 March 1983

3 PRO, MH 74/377: L G Brock A Note on Sir Robert Morant's plans for the development of the Ministry of Health, nd

4 Bodleian Library, Addison Papers Box 53 (Since the paper on which these notes were written bears the embossed stamp of the Ministry of Health, they may be dated within the period July 1919 to March 1920).

heading: 'Physical and Recreational', 'Rivers and Fish', 'Devolution', and 'Health System'. Under 'Devolution', Morant wrote: 'This is also the cure for the trouble as to size of Cabinet and consequent inability to get problems properly worked out.' This was a personal obsession: one close colleague recalled: 'he had a passion for making the instruments of public service more effective.'[1]

He proposed five cabinets, one each for England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, to deal with domestic affairs broadly conceived; and a fifth, a United Kingdom cabinet composed of eleven members: a foreign minister, an army minister, and so on. The only oddities in this listing are the presence of a Lord Chancellor and a Minister of Justice, and the absence of a Home Affairs Minister. It reads very much like the thinking one might expect from a signatory of the Haldane Report, leavened by service in the English Commission.

Morant's comments under the heading 'Health System' merit replication in full. They amply justify Brock's view that "in essence his plan for the health machine differed very little from his plan conceived 20 years earlier for the education machine."[2] Brock added that he thought that

1 Dictionary of National Biography 1912-21, p. 387

2 Violet Markham 'Sir Robert Morant: Some Personal Reminiscences' Public Administration xxviii (1950), 258

Morant's enquiry into the French educational system, conducted whilst he was assistant director of special inquiries and reports in the Education Department, "had left a permanent mark on him."[1]

Morant wrote:

> 'Elaborate a little the Health Services eg. Arrange for every place of suitable size to have its primary Health centre, (just as naturally as its elementary school) with arrangements for Infant Welfare, Doctors' Consultations, etc. etc,; and for every area of a larger size to have its Secondary Health Centre (just as naturally as its Secondary school) with its higher health services, hospital beds, laboratories, nursing services, consultant services, etc. etc.; and for every suitable aggregation of six or eight contiguous counties to have its Tertiary Centre (just as naturally as its University) where there wd. be all forms of Hospital Provision, medical school etc. etc. -
>
> The whole linked up with one another, and with the general practitioners everywhere, and with systemised motor ambulance transport ubiquitously. It

1 loc. cit.

need not be gratuitous. There could be charges. But it shd. be publicly provided, and available everywhere for everyone who chose to use it.

The cost wd. in a few years be largely met by reduction in enlisting poor law and unemployment & sick expenditure that is at present caused by needless breakdowns.'[1]

Brock's notes identify what he described as Morant's 'leading ideas' in six areas of public health: medical and auxillary services, lunacy, maternity, tuberculosis, medical research, and dentistry.[2] So far as administration was concerned, Brock believed that Morant's public medical service would be the executive responsibility of a health committee, partly co-opted since he thought it 'the only means of securing the enthusiast and the expert.' The purse-strings would be held by the county and the county borough councils which would become the local health authorities. It would be responsible for poor law medical services and for 'practically all other services.' 'He thought that the voluntary hospital was doomed:' the local authorities were to have control of the complete range of hospital services. Unification at the centre - the Ministry of Health - required as its corollary

1 Bodleian Library, Addison Papers Box 53

2 PRO, MH 79/377: L G Brock A Note on Sir Robert Morant's plans for the department of the Ministry of Health, nd

unification of the smaller local authorities. As Brock points out, 'in this his mind reverted to the plan of the 1902 Education Bill: ... the balance of advantage was all on the side of using existing Local Goverment units in health just as in education.' Those who advocated ad hoc authorities in public health 'laid too much stress', Brock thought Morant believed:

> 'On treatment to the neglect of preventive medicine. He wanted the body which was responsible for the treatment of disease to be the same as the body responsible for preventing it.'

What is not clear from all this is the exact nature of the financial foundations on which Morant's 'Health System' was to be erected. His ideas presuppose faith in the willingness of local health authorities to provide a full and widening range of services. But for them to do so, central government would necessarily have to offer generous loans or non-repayable subventions to bolster local authorities heavily reliant on an inflexible revenue derived principally from rates; and it was to prove increasingly inadequate to the demands made of it in the 1920s. One of the ironies of the local government system of those years was that the expansion of local responsibilities, especially in the years before the war, inevitably required greater central involvement, both financially and, consequently, through supervision and control. Moreover - as Brock conceded -

Morant 'had no patience with the view that inefficient Local Authorities ought to be left to wallow in their inefficiency in order to preserve some sacred principle of autonomy.'[1] Subsequent chapters examine the response of a later generation of administrators and politicians to this problem.

1 loc. cit.

3. A DEPARTMENT ENVISAGED

Sir Robert Morant was a prominent figure in a small group of officials and outsiders, Sidney and Beatrice Webb amongst them, determined to professionalize the civil service. Morant's beliefs have been neatly summarised as being 'to streamline the administrative machine and to ensure a logical coherence between its functions and its parts.'[1] The Webbs had propounded the cause of administrative functionalism in the minority report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress. The Haldane Committee dealt thoroughly with the concept. The proponents of this line of reasoning were few in number but, by virtue of their articulacy and their proximity to the political elite, had a potential for influence that, though it was less than they imagined, was disproportionate to their size as a group.

Central to their version of administrative functionalism was an emphasis on the presence of the right individuals within 'the right machinery.'[2] Morant wanted 'the right type of men'[3] to do more than have bright ideas in a vacuum: he

1 José Harris William Beveridge: A Life (London, 1978), p. 165

2 Violet Markham 'Sir Robert Morant: Some Personal Reminiscences' Public Administration xxviii (1950), 258

3 loc. cit.

sought to have them implemented. In a lecture delivered a few days before his death, he declared unguardedly:

> 'The Civil Service can have an immense influence for good towards developing new notions, and generating the proper force for bringing their reforms into effective existence and operation.'[1]

In Morant's scheme of things, the civil servant was to play a central role as a stimulus of political actions. Morant is said once to have cried out: "circumstance, circumstance! I endeavour to control circumstance, not circumstance me."[2] He was convinced that even the most apathetic minister would be sparked into activity if only he was surrounded by committed officials.

No permanent secretary is properly devoid of opinions about his department's responsibilities, and Morant was not an exception. What is unusual is that he began to express his views on public health before the First World War. Naturally his position as Vice-Chairman of the English Commission obliged him to do so to some extent, but Morant's views go beyond those which one might expect to be held by someone concerned with health insurance.

2 Sir Robert Morant 'Duties and Responsibilities of the Civil Service towards the Public' in The Civil Servant and His Profession (London, 1920)

3 Sir George Newman The Building of a Nation's Health (London, 1939), p. 468

This is clearest in Morant's interest in medical education in general and in research in particular.

> 'He was keenly alive to the necessity of improving the general level of medical practice, and with this in view he was always ready to encourage any scheme of central clinics at which medical men would meet one another and discuss cases. .... Morant ... deplored the fact that the ordinary G.P. has too often neither the time nor the inclination to study after he leaves the hospital.'[1]

Morant encouraged research from an early date. The National Insurance Act of 1911 had made available funds built up at the rate of 1d per person insured for the purpose of supporting research in universities and elsewhere.[2] Sir Laurence Brock believed that the Medical Research Committee, which had been set up in 1913, 'was really (Morant's) creation, and it was he who found Sir Walter Fletcher, its brilliant secretary.'[3] The creation of an Advisory Council for Medical Research to guide and to assist the committee was one of the models for the Ministry of Health's consultative councils. The terms of membership were identical:

1 PRO, MH 79/377: L G Brock A Note on Sir Robert Morant's plans for the development of the Ministry of Health, nd

2 National Insurance Act (1911), section 16, sub-section 2

3 PRO, MH 79/377: op. cit.

appointment to both the Advisory and to the consultative councils were for three years, with one-third resigning at intervals of two years in the third year of membership.

Morant's ideas are not only interesting in themselves but also because they form the seedbed of the internal organisation he wished to have for the Ministry of Health. A test of the practicability of his thinking about bureaucracy is his proposals for the new department. Do they indicate his faith in 'the right type of men' to have been balanced by a belief in 'the right machine;' or was he more concerned to have loyal associates at his side than to break the mould of the traditional internal structure of government departments? Naturally Morant's hand was not free. He was constrained by the need to take on officials from both of the two departments amalgamated in the new Ministry, and obliged to some extent to incorporate the structure of the Local Government Board. He did not have a clean slate. His death in March 1920 necessarily prevented him from further extension and development of his ideas. Nevertheless Morant's achievement is sufficiently clear for an assessment to be made.

Before the Ministry came into being, Morant discussed the deployment of its staff with those he proposed to bring into the department with him. In keeping with his views on civil

servants' functions as a generative force, he planned the higher division of the administrative class on an enlarged scale. It was to have three tiers: one at the level of permanent secretary and another at assistant secretary, with an intermediate rank between the two. There were to be ten assistant secretaries, two of whom would receive salaries above the maximum increment for the grade. At the base of the pyramid formed by the administrative class, there were to be not less than twenty-five principals and the same number of assistant principals.[1]

The purpose of this structure was to heighten co-ordination and co-operation between the department's eleven divisions. The assistant secretaries were to run their respective divisions, and the two 'superior' assistant secretaries were to be responsible for the control and guidance of their activities. Morant reserved to himself "the higher direction" of policy, "which is my province," whilst giving to Sir John Anderson, the Second Secretary, all the other functions, especially those concerning the details of establishment and organisation in which Morant was little interested.[2]

1 PRO, T 1/12384/40835/19: Sir John Anderson to the permanent secretary of the Treasury, June 1919

2 Markham op. cit., p. 255

Morant wanted parity of status between Anderson and himself. He referred several times to Anderson as 'the other Permanent Secretary in this Ministry'[1] and tried hard to obtain for him a salary equal to his own. Addison's minute of appointment described them as 'Secretaries to the Ministry' with Morant to be titled 'First Secretary' and Anderson 'Second Secretary.'[2] The Treasury disliked this distinction, and refused to accept Morant's arguments for equality of pay. It conceded the titles; but after 1925 the Ministry's two senior officials reverted to the designations 'Secretary' and 'Deputy Secretary.'

The Treasury also cavilled at the Ministry's request for two 'super' assistant secretaries and at the number of assistant secretaries, though it conceded that the new department might be considered to be a special case. Niemeyer, a senior Treasury official, even went so far as to observe that '<u>prima facie</u> I should say a normal Accountant General ought not to get more than an Assistant Secretary grade.'[3] Generally the Treasury was attempting to impose tighter control of departmental spending by promoting accounting officers within

1 PRO, MH 78/114: Sir Robert Morant to Sir Bernard Mallet, 9 August 1919

2 PRO, MH 107/1: Establishment files - Sir Robert Morant

3 PRO, T 1/12396/44415/19: comment initialled by (Sir) O(tto) N(iemeyer), nd

official hierarchies; but its principles were flexible where there was an opportunity of saving money. Ultimately the Treasury gave way on both of the Ministry's requests.

Much thought had been given to the way in which the department was to conduct its business. A clear separation was envisaged between the administrative and the executive classes. It was intended that the latter was to concern itself with the daily work of the Ministry whilst the former was to be responsible for the long-term development of policy. The internal organisation of the divisions reflected this approach to bureaucracy. Let us consider an example.

The Insurance Department was to have a Controller and a Deputy Controller at its head. The Controller, Sir Walter Kinnear, received a salary of £1,550 p.a.: that is, at the upper end of the principal assistant secretary scale. He was, nevertheless, restricted to a function that was essentially executive. An assistant secretary, L G Brock, though paid a smaller salary (£1,000-1,200), was made responsible for 'the higher direction.' Anderson set out the position in a minute.

> 'The former (the Controller) will be solely responsible for the efficient working of the insurance machine while the latter

(the assistant secretary) will be concerned with Ministerial policy in relation to health insurance. In some respects the two officers will occupy the relative positions of General Manager and Secretary in a private insurance company.'[1]

Anderson conceded that Brock would have little to do except when legislation was in prospect. The relationship between Controller and assistant secretary rankled with Kinnear, and only six days after Morant's death he sought and obtained from Addison admission to the cadre of those responsible for "the higher direction."[2]

This detailed account of intradepartmental relations may seem to have only an antiquarian interest. In fact it has a wider significance. Morant was trying to establish an exclusive elite at the head of the administrative class whose job it would be to concentrate wholly on long-term issues. Its few members were to be given the time to do so by being relieved of the daily routines of administrative activity - the 'red tape' which had allegedly restricted the vision of the higher officials of the Local Government Board. In his comments on

1 PRO, T 1/12396/44415/19: Notes on the Organisation Proposed for the Ministry of Health, submitted by Sir John Anderson

2 Bodleian Library, Addison Papers Box 38: Kinnear to Addison, 19 March 1920; Markham op. cit., p. 255

devolution, Morant had sought to reduce the number of Cabinet members involved in policy formation so as 'to get problems properly worked out' by a few and not obscured by the many.[1] He looked for the same organisation in the Ministry of Health.

Morant's belief in the need for a departmental 'think tank' derived from his administrative experience and from service on the Haldane Committee. He had begun his career in a specialised intelligence division of the Board of Education, and had then become its permanent secretary. The Haldane Committee's report (some paragraphs of which are written in a distinctive style similar to Morant's - he was mentor and patron to the committee's secretary, Michael Heseltine), recommended the setting up of a Ministry of Research. This explains Morant's inclinations as a practitioner towards 'the higher direction' of departmental business unencumbered by bureaucratic minutiae.

A similar blend of theory and practice accounts for the creation of the Ministry of Health's consultative councils. The Haldane Report suggested that bodies of this kind should be set up by government departments and that they should consider not only those topics referred to them by ministers but also 'be entitled to submit representations (on matters)

1 Bodleian Library, Addison Papers Box 53

which may not have been made the subject of a reference.' Even civil servants not involved with this committee supported the principle, aware of the existence of 'public opinion' after the Representation of the People Act and conscious of the part played by experts enrolled in the service during the war.

The Ministry of Health's official historian concluded that:

> 'Special Consultative Councils have much to be said in their favour as an aid to bureaucratic and to democratic government: .... The critical opinion of the non-expert is necessary before important administrative action is undertaken.'[1]

Their existence has been seen as an effort made by the department 'to transform the central authority from a mere administrative unit, into an active force in the general progress of the public services.'[2] They would also have an effect on the department itself. In the plain language of Dr Addison: 'I believe that it will mean that the Ministry itself will be kept up to the mark.'[3]

1 Sir Arthur Newsholme The Ministry of Health (London, 1925) pp. 84, 92

2 R N Spann 'The Use of Advisory Bodies by the Ministry of Health' in R V Vernon and N Mansergh (eds.) Advisory Bodies (London, 1940), p. 281

3 Hansard 5th series, 1919, cii. 1836

Section four of the Ministry of Health Act, 1919 empowered the Minister to establish councils 'for giving .... advice and assistance,' and made a point of requiring that each one should 'include women as well as men, and shall consist of persons having practical experience of the matters referred to the Council.'[1] The determination to include women was the product of the failure to set up an exclusively female council along the lines advocated by Lady Rhondda and others.

The reference to 'persons having practical experience' caused much discussion amongst civil servants. Similar councils were not unknown in the service, but officials examined and discarded the precedents so far as they related to the proposed composition of the Ministry's councils. An analogy with the Consumers' Council of the Ministry of Food was rejected on the grounds that the Ministry of Health did not want representatives nominated by organisations with public health interests. Michael Heseltine, the official immediately concerned with the setting up of the Ministry's councils, considered that the Board of Agriculture's four national councils had been given powers that would prove to be unworkably great: the right to participate in the work of departments goes 'much too far.'[2]

1 The Ministry of Health Act, 1919, section 4 (1), (2)

2 PRO, MH 73/8: Heseltine to the Minister (of Reconstruction), 11 July 1918

He struggled to devise a form of membership that would at the same time accommodate the expressed desire to give 'public opinion' representation in the processes of departmental deliberation and yet deny interest groups the opportunity of jamming that process with their own claims and counter-claims. What, he reasonably asked, was 'public opinion?' 'This form of opinion is, so far as I know, almost entirely unorganised if not unexpressed.'[1]

Heseltine was thrown back on the solution of the Ministerial selection of members of representative bodies like the trade unions and the Professional Workers' Federation. There is no evidence that he appreciated that the voice of public opinion might more properly be expressed by the Minister himself rather than by consultative bodies; by politicians - the people's elected representatives - rather than by interest groups composed of politically minded experts. The activities of these councils are the subject of subsequent discussion.[2]

A further indication of Morant's plans for the Ministry of Health lay in his desire to associate it closely with the Registrar-General's Office. Two sources only have survived

1 PRO, MH 73/29: Heseltine to Morant, 10 May 1919

2 See below, section five

that indicate what he wanted the Office to become. Both are memoranda, the first being undated and unsigned but with stylistic quirks to suggest that Morant himself had a hand at least in its preparation. Its contents are comparable with those of the other memorandum, which had been drawn up by Morant's protege, Vivian, and submitted to Dr Addison by the former beneath his enthusiastic note of commendation.[1]

Taken together, the argument of these documents was that the Office regarded itself, and was seen by others, as an autonomous department independent of the other institutions of central government. It dealt 'at arm's length with the President of the Local Government Board' with whom, so it was said, it ought to be related.[2] Interestingly the Office's alleged inadequacies were explained not by reference to recent developments in administration nor to those imagined in the future but to what was asserted to be customary practice. It was claimed that the Registrar-General did not occupy 'the position of an ordinary civil servant under Ministerial control in accordance with the normal doctrine.'[3] The changes the Ministry now envisaged, so the

1 PRO, MH 78/114: Morant to Addison, 28 November 1919

2 PRO, MH 78/114: The Relation, Past and Future, between the Registrar-General and the Minister of Health (unsigned, nd)

3 loc. cit.

argument ran, would merely bring the Office into present day conditions. They would not mark an unprecedented departure from contemporary experience. It was an argument cast, perhaps not unknowingly, in a guise that would create the least controversy.

At an early stage Morant obtained the Treasury's consent and that, apparently independently, of the Prime Minister as well. Both agreed that the Office should be brought under the general jurisdiction of the Minister of Health. This agreement was then used as a stimulus and a justification for 'a complete change in the theory of the relations between the Minister and the Registrar-General.'[1]

For the Ministry it involved, though this remained implicit in the official correspondence, the removal of Sir Bernard Mallet, the incumbent head of the Office, and his replacement by Morant's own candidate, S P Vivian. Mallet had been Registrar-General since 1909 but might not retire until 1924 when he, and coincidentally Morant himself, reached the age at which retirement was usually enforced. Morant was too impatient to loiter. As he put it in the opening and characteristically breathless sentence of the note he sent to

1 ibid.

Addison:

> 'This very interesting Mem^m^ shows how undeveloped the R.G.'s Office has been allowed to remain all these years, and how many things are crying out to be done, and how useful a Reform it is to have brought it into close relation to the Min^y^ of Health.[1]

Morant wanted to 'create all sorts of good potentialities'[2] and he could not wait to do so. A detailed examination of the events that followed illumines Morant's goals and techniques.

The opening gambit of Morant's offensive was to insinuate Vivian into the Office. The title 'Deputy Registrar-General' was concocted and put to Mallet. His response - a weak one - was to observe that the salary designated for Vivian was too high. He ignored the opportunity to attack, and seemed accordingly to concede, the principle of a deputy's existence: 'pray do not think from what I have written that I am opposed to your suggestions.'[3] Morant swiftly rejoined that the difficulties Mallet had raised had been anticipated and that they would be circumvented. He concluded with a

1 PRO, MH 78/114: Morant to Addison, 28 November 1919

2 loc. cit.

3 PRO, MH 78/114: Mallet to Morant, 19 June 1919

sentence of provocative wishful-thinking:

> 'Hence it seems true to say, does it not, that the proposed arrangement would have the cordial concurrence of the Registrar-General in view of all the circumstances.'[1]

Mallet's resistance stiffened. His original objection to the new Deputy Registrar-Generalship, that its salary could not be justified especially when taken in relation to his own, now found a receptive ear in the Treasury. In its reply to a memorandum giving details of the new Ministry's organisation, the Treasury observed that Mallet's '"concurrence",' claimed by Morant, was not as cordial as was suggested.[2] The Treasury went on to argue that the Registrar-General's post and his staff in any case were in the patronage of the First Lord and not of the Minister of Health; and that the Ministry's claim for a high salary for Mallet's deputy must be resisted on the grounds that it would make it too attractive: the position, the Treasury believed, could not be an arduous one. The Treasury's third objection was that it did not wish to see another proto-principal assistant secretary at the Ministry of Health. There were too many assistant secretaries at the department already, and although

1 PRO, MH 78/114: Morant to Mallet, 23 June 1919

2 PRO, T 1/12396/44415/19: a Treasury official to Anderson, 4 July 1919

it grudgingly admitted the existence of special conditions there, its view was that a uniform salary scale ought to be maintained.

A few days later, the debate was lifted from negotiations between officials to arbitration between the two ministers involved. As the Chancellor of the Exchequer remarked drily to the Minister of Health:

> 'I think you are also mistaken in supposing that the Registrar-General concurs in your proposal. He is certainly interested in the strengthening of his Department, but the details of this particular appointment do not seem to have been covered by his concurrence.'[1]

At this crucial moment, with Morant's initiative apparently stymied at ministerial level, Mallet committed what subsequently seems to have been a tactical error: he elected to take three weeks holiday. Before leaving for Norfolk, he sent a petulant letter to Morant.

> 'I rather resent being kept in the dark about negotiations which appear to be going on about myself and my office. .... I should feel somewhat hurt if these matters were settled over my head without giving me an opportunity of putting forward my views.'[2]

1 PRO, MH 78/114: Austen Chamberlain to Addison, 11 July 1919

2 PRO, MH 78/114: Mallet to Morant, 16 July 1919

Morant's reply was couched in the soothing tones of one who has victory in sight. Nothing untoward would happen whilst Mallet was absent from London, wrote Morant reassuringly. He was himself about to take his own leave. He did not reveal that he had already asked the department's solicitor to draft an order in council transferring to the Minister of Health 'all the powers of the Treasury and the First Lord .... in respect of the Registrar-General and his staff and office and work.'[1]

Mallet's defeatism increased the longer he stayed in Norfolk. He extended his absence from Whitehall by a fortnight, advising Morant that though he was happy to return to discuss the plans for his department, he was, 'of course quite ready to accept any solution which may be arrived at as to the question of my office - not that it matters I daresay whether I do or not.'[2] This final remark represents his capitulation. The Treasury had already changed sides. Addison had obtained Lloyd George's approval of Vivian's appointment - Morant made sure to record the Prime Minister's remark that he remembered Vivian because he had himself been impressed by his qualities - and Chamberlain was duly over-ruled.[3] Anderson noted that the Chancellor now

1 PRO, MH 78/114: Morant to Gwyer, 8 August 1919

2 PRO, MH 78/114: Mallett to Morant, 10 August 1919

3 PRO, MH 78/114: J A(nderson), 30 September 1919

supported the Minister's plans for the Office. He had agreed furthermore to give Mallet an interview to hint clearly that he might consider retirement. His sixtieth birthday had passed, and his removal would ease the proposed reorganisations. Anderson added that Chamberlain had said that he was prepared to encourage Mallet's retirement, if the hint was not taken, by emphasising the intention to link closely, and effectively to subordinate, the Office to the new department.[1]

Duly installed in the thin disguise of Deputy Registrar-General, Vivian set about revivifying the General Register Office. It is clear that all communications at a senior level between the two departments were conducted through Vivian despite Mallet's continued presence, for he had refused Chamberlain's seductive words on the attractions of retirement. Vivian was required by Addison to keep the Registrar-General fully abreast of the Ministry's proposals, and to allow him ample opportunity to comment on them. He did so; for as Morant explained in a long memorandum that was a mutual justification of his and Vivian's actions, and which Addison endorsed:

> 'Both he and I have continuously done our best to adhere rigidly to the

1 PRO, MH 78/114: J A(nderson), 30 September 1919

> rule which (if I may say so) you
> properly imposed on us, that so long as
> Sir Bernard was kept as R.G. we must
> "play the game" in regard to him.'[1]

Mallet had entrenched himself in a position from which no appeasement, be it ever so deftly applied, would have dislodged him. He believed that no account was paid to the comments he offered on Vivian's plans; and though it was true that the few he made were rather listened to than acted on, his complaints to the Treasury strongly implied that his views went unsought. To Vivian he objected peevishly that:

> ' ... as your scheme has been adopted
> by the Minister and recommended to the
> Treasury there is obviously nothing
> that I can usefully add at this stage
> .... as I gather that these
> appointments (two members of staff) are
> practically decided on and that the
> Minister concurs there is nothing for
> me to say.'[2]

Mallet held on grimly until the end of the year when he retired. From 1 January 1921, Vivian took over the position he had held in all but name during the previous eighteen months.

1 PRO, MH 78/114: Morant and Vivian to Anderson, 5 February 1920

2 PRO, RG 20/6: Mallet to Vivian, 7 August 1920

Mallet's ill-feeling was not unique, though his rank gave him the chance to express it freely. That some members of his staff were similarly piqued despite their necessary circumspection is reflected in a comment of Vivian's in October 1920. Members of the Office were generally sensitive and especially to a particular proposal, he explained.

> 'They are already disgruntled by my introduction of several men into so small a higher staff; and I can hardly (in my peculiar position) afford to alienate them seriously, especially as I cannot show any decided advantage on balance to be obtained.'[1]

Vivian was well aware of the limits to Morant's strategy. The pre-supposition that without a loyal colleague in the Office the Ministry's 'reform' was doomed was confronted by events that strongly underlined the disadvantages of personifying in one individual and in this way the fundamental administrative changes that Morant sought to impose.

Morant had faced one of the classic dilemmas of institutional change: to reform from within or to do so from outside. He

1 PRO, RG 20/6: Vivian to Leggett, 16 August 1920 (H A Leggett was the assistant director of establishments at the Ministry of Health from 1919 until 1924, and the proposal referred to by Vivian presumably had to do with the rearrangement of personnel at the Registrar-General's Office)

could leave the Office's staff as he found it and run the risk that his reformist pleas would not carry across the gulf set between departmental self-interests in mutual opposition; or he could put in his own nominee, with the danger that he would be isolated in an unsympathetic environment.

Why did Mallet and his colleagues resist proposals which seem so straight-forward and unexceptional to the historian? We have seen that Morant first presented his case for reform as a pressing need for 'a complete change in the theory of the relations between the Minister and the Registrar-General' so as to bring it into 'accordance with the normal doctrine.'[1] Did Mallet oppose him because he was antagonistic to this new theory, or was he reacting in a personal sense to what he interpreted as an unalloyed assault on his authority?

At another level of interpretation, the historian must make up his mind about these officials' depth of sincerity. Nowhere does Mallet defend the principle of his Office's existence as a unit isolated from other departments on grounds other than an affection for the status quo. It may be that he settled on his defence after calculating that it

1 PRO, MH 78/114: The Relation, Past and Future, between the Registrar-General and the Minister of Health (unsigned, nd)

was the one that would appeal most strongly to the Treasury. The sophistication of the counter-argument to the Ministry of Health may be hidden by partiality in the surviving papers. But the same interpretation can be turned onto Morant's views. His justification of the line he took in the dispute with Mallet was the desirability of a change in the theory, but he may have imagined this to be an impervious disguise of what would otherwise be revealed to be blatant empire-building.

There is an essential artificiality in much of inter-departmental rivalry. Experienced officials are connoisseurs of tactics. They know or imagine they know what will win the day for their cause. The argument that seems most likely to avail against the one opposing it is often the first choice. There may or there may not be matters of the highest principle at stake. If objections to the levels of officials' salaries or to the adquacies of accommodation appear at the time the most potent, these are the ones that will be used, weightier issues notwithstanding.

The fact that such issues were nowhere recorded does not mean that they went unconsidered, or that they were not uppermost in the minds of the officials engaged apparently in the relentless pursuit of trivia. In the same fashion, heady principles may be convenient disguises for baser motives.

Appearances sometimes deceive. Just as matters of principle may not be irrelevant to disputes between departments, and yet may not by themselves explain their conclusions, so also may the tactics be not as unprincipled as at first they appear.

The motivations of the participants in this case are as indistinct to the historian as they may have been to the actors themselves. Mallet's response to Morant's overtures suggest either tactical thinking or good fortune, for the Treasury's initial reactions closely replicate his own. Morant was deeply suspicious of Mallet's allegedly devious behaviour, believing that he was souring the minds of prominent Treasury officials to the Ministry's scheme: but such suspicions are characteristic of Morant, often himself the target of charges of deviousness. The thought - or Mallet's luck - did not extend beyond the opening moves. He was quickly worn down by Morant's relentlessness, and then by his alliance with the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health. When the Treasury and the Chancellor deserted him, as they did in the autumn of 1919, Mallet had no resources to deploy in defence of whatever principled objections he may have had to Morant's scheme.

Difficult though it may be to identify these officials' motives, some conclusions do suggest themselves. Morant

aimed not to subordinate the Office but to turn it into a partner in his department's creation of 'all sorts of good potentialities.' He believed that more sophisticated statistical studies, which he expected to be one of the first fruits of Vivian's involvement, would assuredly lead to initiatives for political implementation and administrative change. Sometimes the stimulus for such work would come from the Ministry and sometimes from the representatives on the Office's staff of Morant's 'corps d'elite.' Morant was at pains to insist that members of both departments should correspond freely, disregarding their separation in two different institutions; and, at first, they seem to have done so.[1]

Did these changes create the 'good potentialities' Morant anticipated, or have effects unlooked for by the reformers? There are signs that the status quo was not much altered. We have seen that Vivian early sensed resistance to Morant's plans. He needed to establish himself at the head of a restive staff 'disgruntled,' he thought, by reform and by rumours of reform. A cautious approach, not the energetic activism expected by Morant, made sense; and Vivian's own views, so far as they can be discovered, buttressed such a

1 PRO, MH 78/114: The Relation, Past and Future, between the Registrar-General and the Minister of Health (unsigned, nd)

response. In a lecture given under the auspices of the Society of Civil Servants, he bemoaned the scant use of statisticians.

> "(The administrator) pursues his duties without much regard to the equipment or needs of the statistician until the emergency arises .... (in fact) the interests of the two, the administrator and the statistician, are mutual."[1]

Morant would have applauded that, but would not have given his support to Vivian's conservative view of statisticians' role in initiating policy.

> "If statistical research appears to point with great cogency to a particular policy, should it not be put before the Minister as advice? To that proposition I should be inclined to say 'yes' if I thought that such advice could in practice by of use, or be made use of, by a government."[2]

If this comment faithfully reflects Vivian's understanding - that statistical work should not generate political actions, even if one in particular is directly suggested by it, unless the wider political conditions seem favourable - Morant had chosen an unsuitable vessel for his reforming zeal.

1 S P Vivian 'Statistics in Administration' Public Administration i (1923), 115

2 ibid., p. 110

Vivian's attempts to put into practice Morant's scheme to bring the Office 'under Ministerial control in accordance with the normal doctrine' were confronted by the realities of departmental administration. Moreover the immediate post-war years saw an economic retrenchment and an assertion of Treasury primacy that presented the least promising setting for the internal reorganisation of any government department, and neither had been anticipated by Morant.

4. THE MEDICAL AND THE LAY ADMINISTRATIVE CLASSES

The relationship between the Ministry's medically qualified civil servants and its generalists was much debated in the first eighteen months of the department's existence. The members of the medical staff, convinced that the Local Government Board suffered from '"too much poor law" and lay official predominance,' were determined to obtain parity of status with their generalist colleagues.[1] As a symbol of their equality, the chief medical officer wanted a position that was in every way equivalent to that of the department's permanent secretary. He sought the right of independent access to the Minister of Health, a privilege customarily accorded only to the head of the department; absolute administrative discretion within the medical side as though the permanent head of a separate medical department; and a permanent secretary's salary so as to advertise to the civil service and to his professional colleagues outside it that he was the state's senior medical officer.

1 Sir George Newman The Building of a Nation's Health (London, 1939), p. 121

This debate took place at a time when generalists within the civil service felt their own position to be less secure than ever before. During the war the service had been swollen by professional experts of every sort, both military and civilian, to whose advice that of lay administrators had often necessarily been subordinated due to the exigencies of the times. On leaving their departments after the war, some of these experts had published trenchant criticisms of the methods of career civil servants.[1] At the same time technical experts of various kinds were increasingly important in the activities of government departments even in peacetime: not just medical men and women, but also chemists, physicists, biologists, transport specialists, and others. Clearly the status quo ante bellum was irrecoverable.

Immediately after the war the Treasury set up a committee to consider salaries of permanent heads of government deprtments and, only by inference, the position of technical officers in the civil service.[2] It concluded that experts should be on tap and not on top. Sir Warren Fisher, appointed the head of the civil service in 1919, shored up the weakened status of generalists by arguing that their bureaucratic skills formed

1 Sir Stephen Demetriadi Inside a Government Office (London, 1921) is a good example

2 The committee, chaired by H H Asquith, reported in 1920

an expertise as distinct as the technical knowledge of those with professional qualifications. It was a credible view but one fatally undermined by the Treasury's failure, until after 1945, to provide administrative officers with any training other than practical experience.

In the Ministry of Health the debate between the medical and the lay administrative officials must be set within this context lest it should appear on occasion merely an elevated disguise for personal ambition. The medical staff was retrospective, looking back to the alleged hurts inflicted on their predecessors by the generalists of the past. Newman, who had a profoundly well developed whig historical sense, referred frequently to Sir John Simon's career as though, detached from its context, it represented a precedent for the new Ministry's lay-medical relations in the 1920s and 1930s.

He was acutely sensitive to his own status within the bureaucratic hierarchy of the Ministry of Health. He was regarded by the lay administrators as being - in the words of one of them - 'a difficult, prickly sort of man.'[1] His

1 Dr B H Harrison, Corpus Christi College, Oxford: tape-recording of an interview with Sir Douglas Veale, 14 January 1969
(I am most grateful to Dr Harrison for allowing me to listen to the tape-recording of this extremely interesting conversation with a former member of the Ministry of Health, an excellent example of oral administrative history. The details of Veale's career are given in appendix three)

relations with Sir Robert Morant and with Dr Addison cooled during the course of 1919, having been on first name terms with the latter whilst they worked together on the welfare of munition workers committee.[1] Following Sir Arthur Robinson's appointment, there was a complete breakdown in anything other than formal communication between permanent secretary and the chief medical officer. What should have been a reasoned debate about the relation of the medical staff to the lay administrative hierarchy became a bitter dispute fuelled by Newman's ambition.

Newman had become a civil servant in 1907, persuaded by Beatrice Webb and by Morant to join the Board of Education as its chief medical officer. Morant was then the Board's permanent secretary. Once together, the two officials had often discussed such subjects as the poor law and the need for a ministry of health.[2] Neither matter was their own department's responsibility or concern but those of the Local Government Board, towards which Morant already cast covetous eyes. He told Newman in February 1908 of the impending:

1 Bodleian Library, Addison Papers Box 53: Morant to Addison, 28 August 1919; Department of Health and Social Security, Alexander Fleming House, London: Sir George Newman Daybooks, 1919 passim

2 Sir George Newman Daybooks, entries dated 18 February and 17 March 1908

> 'Resignation of C(ampbell) B(annerman) and possible changes including his own position ?going to L.G.B. in place of Sir S.B. Provis.'[1]

Beatrice Webb hoped to persuade Asquith, who became Prime Minister in April, to reform the Board's internal organisation fundamentally, the appointment of Morant as its permanent secretary being the surest means of achieving it. She and Newman expected that he would be asked to accompany Morant on this transfer. They overestimated their influence: on Sir Samuel Provis' retirement in 1910, his place was taken by internal promotion.

Newman set about strengthening his position at the Board of Education. In the British Imperial Calendar for 1912, he is described not only as the Board's chief medical officer but also as one of its principal assistant secretaries. This indicates that administrative status had been added to what had hitherto been the senior medical official's advisory and executive functions. Newman's combined role remedied the disadvantages which Sir John Simon believed had undermined his own position at the Local Government Board.[2]

1 ibid., entry dated 12 February 1908 (Sir Samuel Provis was the permanent secretary at the Local Government Board from 1898 until 1910)

2 Sir John Simon English Sanitary Institutions (London, 1890), passim; see above, chapter one, section two

Newman had Simon's autobiographical analysis constantly in mind: indeed, his approach to the proposed organisation of the Ministry of Health was largely determined by his historical understanding.

Addison became President of the Local Government Board in January 1919 and soon pressed Morant and Newman to join him there "to work it up into the Ministry of Health;" and Newman, in turn, told Morant that he would accept only if he did.[1] Newman made it clear that he wanted the administrative responsibilities he had had at the Board of Education.

> 'The public interest has for many years suffered through the short-sighted policy of the Local Government Board in giving their Medical Officer no administrative functions and placing him in a subordinate position under an Assistant Secretary.'[2]

He wrote that he was anxious that there should not be another false start.

1 Violet Markham 'Sir Robert Morant: Some Personal Reminiscences' Public Administration xxviii (1950), 255

2 PRO, MH 78/92: Newman to Addison, 10 February 1919

Addison accepted Newman's contention and, having obtained the retirement of Sir Arthur Newsholme, hitherto the Board's medical officer, authorized the issue of a minute announcing Newman's appointment and noting that:

> '(He) has direct access to the Minister, has the direction of all Medical Officers (men and women) in the service of the Board in all branches of its work (including the Poor Law) and is responsible for advising the Board in all matters involving medical considerations. He has, of course, the right of sending for all official papers, necessary for these purposes, and of conferring with all officers of the Board.'[1]

The premise on which Morant built his plan for the internal organisation of the Ministry of Health was quite different from the one that had satisfied Newman at the Board of Education. Morant wanted to dissolve the division between lay administrative and medical functions.

Anderson followed his lead, correcting a draft parliamentary estimate by striking out the sub-heading 'Medical Department' and adding the pencilled comment: 'Don't use this separate

1 PRO, MH 107/26: Local Government Board establishment minute, 2 April 1919

heading for medical staff.'[1] Morant declared to his private secretary:

> 'It has always seemed to me that medical knowledge and views must permeate and colour so very large a part (nearly the whole) of such a Department as the Ministry of Health - unlike a heterogeneous department like the Board of Education or the Home Office - that there could not be a Medical Department, (in the sense of work to be done in a particular branch) over which a Medico would be the administrative head: for it would mean nearly all the functions of the Ministry. But I see that Addison contemplates a department of which N(ewman) is to be the Administrative Head. This is quite new to me.'[2]

Morant wanted medical and lay officials to be intermingled in the new department.

> 'There will, of course, be no Medical Department here (as their is at the Board of Education) because here the whole Ministry is to become a Health Department extruding extraneous elements.'[3]

1 PRO, MH 78/27: A rough skeleton draft of a Parliamentary Estimate for the Ministry of Health, initialled by W G H(unter) on 25 June 1919 and amended by J A(nderson)

2 PRO, MH 78/92: Morant to Barter, 15 February 1919 (postscript)

3 PRO, MH 78/92: Morant to Newman, 12 May 1919 (Against this observation, Sir Arthur Robinson commented in the margin 'Eheu! WAR 1/1/35,' perhaps in celebration of the prospect of Newman's retirement in that year)

Morant shared Newman's belief in the 'lay official predominance' of medical staff allegedly demonstrated by the Local Government Board. He expressed his feelings in words that might have been Newman's own.

> 'I am the absolute enemy of any notion of subordinating the medical staff of the Department in any professional matters to the lay staff; ..... I stand absolutely for securing to the medical staff a right of effective influence on the policy and work of the Department. .... the Buchanan's (sic) are not going to be "under" the Willises, nor the Camerons "under" the Stutchburys.'[1]

Where Newman and Morant differed was in the means of avoiding a repetition of 'too much poor law' in the Ministry of Health. Morant pointed out that the new department would only be able to do the work that the Local Government Board had been unable to do if it had high status and prestige in the public mind. He followed Newman in conceding that the internal organisation of the Ministry of Health was a crucial element in making a public impression, but went further in claiming that it was essential that medical officers should be experts in their own right and recognised as such. When Newman recommended the appointment of non-specialist medical practitioners to the tuberculosis staff, Morant disagreed.

1 PRO, MH 78/92: Morant to Newman, 12 May 1919
(F J Willis and H O Stutchbury were senior officials at the Local Government Board)

> 'I believe that we only degrade the prestige of the Ministry and reduce our inspecting functions to a farce, and our stimulating functions to an absurdity, if in present circumstances we send round a man for these purposes who is not <u>much</u> better at the subject than the man whose work he goes to see.'[1]

In order that the medical staff's expertise should be respected, Morant insisted on its purity being untarnished by administrative duties. He argued that 'the characteristics of the Newsholme regime ... must certainly be avoided' and that '(we must) kill for ever the Newsholme fallacy.' But this could not be done, he argued:

> 'If the Medical Staff were, by some mistaken organisation methods, to be utilized for functions which should properly be allotted to the administrative staff. (Accordingly) that Principal Assistant Secretary was a mixture in one person of Lay and Professional functions which is not going to obtain here.'[2]

The medical staff would then become 'a very strong corps.'[3]

On the other hand, the lay administrative staff was to be

1 PRO, MH 78/89: Morant to Newman, 23 January 1920

2 PRO, MH 78/92: Morant to Newman, 12 May 1919

3 loc. cit.

'the channel of communication' to the outer world and within Whitehall and 'the seat of responsiblity' to the Minister.[1]

Newman seems to have agreed that the medical side 'should be organised as a set of officers in parallel with the administrative staff;'[2] and Morant in turn spoke enthusiastically of the need to:

> 'Bring (in) new blood, give a "lift" to the whole corps, develop dynamic energy throughout it, and infect the secretariat too, and generally give enhanced prestige to the whole Ministry.'[3]

There then followed a convoluted wrangle over Newman's salary. The level of remuneration was generally accepted within the civil service as the indication of official status.[4] Addison had created the post of principal medical officer at the Local Government Board and had appointed Newman to it 'with a rank akin to a Secretary' and with a salary that was identical to the one received by the Board's permanent secretary.[5] But the Treasury insisted that Newman's salary should be personal to him; that is, that it

1 loc. cit.

2 PRO, MH 78/89: Newman to Morant, 9 May 1919

3 PRO, MH 78/89: Morant to Addison, 10 May 1919

4 See appendix four

5 PRO, MH 78/92: Addison to H A L Fisher, 17 January 1919

should not be attached to the post and should be reconsidered when Newman left it. When permanent secretaries' salaries were increased in 1920, Newman's was not. He found that, whereas previously he had received £200 more that the Ministry's Second Secretary, his salary was now £1000 less than the permanent secretary's and £200 less than that of the Second Secretary. He argued that Addison's arrangement had been vitiated by the marked disparity in the remuneration of the permanent secretary and himself which had been allowed to develop during 1920.

At the end of that year, Newman re-opened the matter. Significantly he wrote privately to Addison: he did not feel that he had the support of Sir Arthur Robinson, who had replaced Morant on the latter's death in March 1920. He explained in his letter: 'I wish there was someone else who could put this to you.'[1] Newman whittled down his case by conceding: 'I do not refer to the equality w.(ith) the Secretary, which is another principle altogether.'[2] He admitted: 'I am fully satisfied as to the arrangements made by the Minister in respect of the status of the Chief Medical Officer within the Ministry.'[3]

1 PRO, MH 78/92: Newman to Addison, 11 November 1920

2 PRO, MH 78/92: Newman to Addison, 14 December 1920

3 PRO, MH 78/92: Memorandum on Status and Salary of Chief Medical Officer of Ministry of Health, G N(ewman)

By so doing, he accepted Robinson's interpretation of proper departmental organisation. Robinson envisaged the Ministry's officials arranged in a pyramidal hierarchy with the permanent secretary at its head 'in supreme and complete control under the Minister' and whose 'right' and 'duty' it was 'to advise on all issues raised of whatever kind and whoever raises them.' Robinson denied the implication he spotted in Newman's case that:

> 'Health in a health ministry is by nature different from, e.g. trade in a Board of Trade, agriculture in a Board of Agriculture or building in an Office of Works and Buildings, and that, because it is thus different, a special constitution is necessary in this Ministry. Such a view would I think lead logically to the conclusion that health work here should be run by medical men with clerks and typists. But the actual organisation shows that the view is not accepted, since parity of status between administrators and doctors was arranged. This is a very cumbrous and difficult organisation and in my judgement it is in practice leading the medical staff too much into the sphere of administratuon. The complaints that the L.G.B. system still obtains are I think ill-founded - the balance is swinging the other way. Still the system can be made to work, <u>with good will on both sides</u> and

careful observance of the instructions. Where however it seems to me to come to a stop, is when one gets to the top grade under the Minister.'[1]

Robinson added that he believed readjustment of Newman's salary was 'clearly fair' and proposed that he be paid a sum equal to that received by the Second Secretary; and this the Treasury in due course accepted. This arrangement, by which the post of chief medical officer was equated with that of the permanent secretary's deputy, continued throughout the inter-war period and beyond.

What are we to make of the details of this episode? The central question is this: does it represent a stage in a gradual claw-back by generalists of the broad range of administrative functions from the techincal experts who had been sucked into Whitehall by the war? Is it, on the other hand, simply a facet of the personal antipathy of two officials: Robinson, the newly appointed permanent secretary, determined to establish undivided authority within his department; and Newman, vulnerable after Morant's death, resentful of Robinson's attitude to him, and anxious to preserve the position to which he believed he had been appointed?

1 PRO, MH 78/92: Robinson to Addison, 25 February 1921

Newman was not alone in wanting a departmental organisation which would avoid the evils of 'lay official predominance.' The Medical Staff Association of the Ministry of Health, of which Newman was not a member, supported his case in private meetings with the secretaries and with the Minister, and through the Whitley Council machinery. Fisher and Sir Amherst Selby-Bigge, respectively the President and the permanent secretary of the Board of Education, also argued on Newman's side, the latter with a carefully drafted minute distinguishing between 'an ordinary administrative civil servant' and 'a professional man who is employed as a civil servant.'[1] This point was resuscitated from time to time during the interwar period by the professional class.[2]

Difficulties for Newman came with the worsening of his relations with Addison and Morant. They had given him a rank and status akin to the secretary as an answer to his reiterated homilies about the alleged position of medical men in the Local Government Board. They seem also to have promised to obtain for him from the Treasury a salary equal

1 PRO, MH 78/92: Selby-Bigge to H A L Fisher, 8 February 1919

2 The arguments and counter-arguments are admirably summarised in the Royal Commission on the Civil Service, 1929-31, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix viii, Statement Submitted by the Association of First Division Civil Servants, part ii, and Appendix xi, Statement Submitted by the Institute of Professional Civil Servants, part ii

to that of the permanent secretary. Through Addison and Fisher, Newman offered what he described as the 'instructive precedent for the arrangement now proposed .... in the case of Sir John Simon,' but by which Chamberlain refused to be instructed. He wrote to Addison:

> 'I do not propose to argue with you the precedent which you and Fisher think you have found. I do not recognise its applicability, and it is in any case nearly 50 years old.'[1]

Since Newman and his colleagues in the Ministry's medical staff rested their case entirely on Sir John Simon's memoirs, their argument for parity of salary between the chief medical officer and permanent secretaries was decisively defeated by a Chancellor who denied this premise. Chamberlain drew succour from a letter written to him by Asquith which accompanied the latter's report of the committee he had chaired. The committee "were emphatically of opinion that Technical Officers in departments should not receive the same salary as the Permanent Secretary."[2] Even had Newman worn down the Treasury and Chamberlain, its political head - and he believed he had persuaded Addison to put his case directly to the Prime Minister - an exception would have had to have

1 PRO, MH 78/92: addendum to a memorandum prepared by the President of the Board of Education and the Local Government Board, February 1919; response of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Februry 1919

2 PRO, MH 78/92: Robinson to Addison, 16 December 1920

been made to the general rule set down by Asquith and which the Treasury were keen to impose throughout the civil service.

Newman's attempts to secure parity of salary, and therefore of status, for the chief medical officer of the Ministry of Health with its permanent secretary ended in failure. It was not well founded, as we have seen, owing more to Simon's account of his experiences at the Local Government Board than to Newman's response to the circumstances with which he was confronted. Moreover he was a solitary champion of his cause, receiving support only from his department's medical staff association. Addison presented the case to the Chancellor more out of a sense of departmental duty than from personal commitment. Morant and Robinson were both opposed to Newman's claim, through for different reasons. Newman's single success was in obtaining the right of independent access to the Minister, which he subsequently seldom used. There has been no 'lay official predominance' in the Ministry of Health, though it is far from clear that Newman's efforts played any part in achieving this state of affairs. It is significant, finally, that none of Newman's successors has renewed his campaign for parity of status. The last words should be Sir George Godber's:

> 'After 23 years as CMO or Deputy, I have no hesitation in preferring the triad of Minister with Permanent

Secretary and CMO answerable to him, provided that the CMO has equal access to the Minister - as he has.'[1]

1 Sir George Godber 'Doctors in Government' Health Trends xiii (1981), 3 (Godber was the chief medical officer of the Departments of Health and Social Security and of Education and Science, and the Home Office, from 1960 to 1973)

5. THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND ITS OFFICIALS AFTER 1920

This section, which concludes chapter two, describes some of the leading characters of the permanent staff of the Ministry of Health in the 1920; and it identifies changes in them over the course of the decade. It does so, first, at the level of the department's most senior official, the permanent secretary; and, second, within the Ministry itself. It is argued that differences in the deployment of, for example, the department's intelligence branch and its consultative councils over the decade following its creation are of significance in understanding that elusive 'common spirit' and 'common enthusiasm' permeating 'every part of a properly organised body of men' observed by Carlill.[1] This section, finally, attempts to capture the esprit de corps of the permanent staff of the Ministry of Health at this time in the belief that to some extent it illumines officials' practice.[2]

Sir Robert Morant had sought to establish a particular form of departmental organisation within the Ministry of Health.

1 H F Carlill 'Administrative Habits of Mind' Public Administration viii (1930), 130

2 This section should be read in conjunction with the information provided in the appendices

He aimed to create a corps d'elite of senior officials concerned exclusively with policy and elevated from the remaining members of the permanent staff. The latter, able in their own right but of a quality inferior to those above them, were to be responsible for the implementation of the policies devised by their superiors. This arrangement was intended to divide the bureaucratic activities concerned with the formulation of policy from those to do with its implementation.

Morant's scheme of departmental organisation was not effected in its entirety. He died less than a year after the Ministry was created and thus had insufficient opportunity to pursue his goals. In addition the Treasury had been hostile in the face of what it regarded as his dangerous unorthodoxies. After 1920, the year in which Morant died, senior civil servants' attitudes changed markedly. They came to be unsympathetic both to Morant's means and to his ends.

Morant's conception of a divisible bureaucratic function was in any case not generally accepted. Traditionally it has been held that it is of the nature of civil service work that in practice the practicalities of implementation usually influence or determine the content of the policies concerned. This remains the case. Sir Douglas Wass, permanent secretary at the Treasury from 1974 until 1983, has said that:

> 'Only be being involved in everyday issues can people identify the

> longer-term general problems and construct suitable solutions.'[1]

This was very much the prevailing general principle of the Ministry of Health in the 1920s. Furthermore Morant's beliefs required an ambivalence - at best - towards the democratically elected representatives forming the accountable political leadership of a department's permanent staff. If the bureaucratic function is divisible, it is between these two groups not amongst civil servants that it should be apportioned. Historically the constitutional relationship has been that politicians devise policies and officials implement them.

Morant's successor as permanent secretary at the Ministry of Health was Sir Arthur Robinson. Addison had appointed him with a heavy heart for he felt him not to be of his predecessor's high class as an official.[2] Events were to prove that, though Morant and Robinson were certainly unalike in most respects, they stood equal to each other. As the latter's obituarist remarked in The Times, Robinson 'must be considered one of the most successful administrators of his generation.'[3]

1 Douglas Wass Government and the Governed (London, 1984), p. 29

2 Bodleian Library, Addison Papers Box 53

3 The Times 24 April 1950

Differences in Morant's and Robinson's managerial styles are significant indicators of change in the running of the department over which they both successfully presided. Robinson was the foremost representative of a new generation of civil servants.

The son of a Westmorland general merchant and draper, Robinson had been educated at the local grammar school. He won an exhibition to, and then a scholarship at, The Queen's College, Oxford. There he obtained two first classes in greats and a second class honours degree in modern history. He completed this formal academic distinction by taking first place in the civil service examination of 1897. He joined the Colonial Office in the same year and enjoyed rapid advancement, being assistant secretary to the Imperial Confernences of 1907 and 1911.

When Lionel Earle, one of his senior colleagues at the Colonial Office, was appointed permanent secretary of the Office of Works, Robinson accompanied him as his assistant. Earle remembered him as 'a very able young man' and 'of enormous assistance' in the Office's thorough reorganisation.[1] It was at this time that Robinson began to establish a reputation within the civil service as a

1 Sir Lionel Earle Turn Over the Page (London, 1935), p. 92

formidable departmental manager. He was chosen in 1917 to set up the newly created Air Ministry, the first of the three permanent secretaryships of his career. When he moved to the Ministry of Health in 1920, he was still only forty-five.

Robinson's career is quickly delineated: his personality and attitudes are not. Autobiographical comment is limited to the pithy but revealing self-characterisation that he believed he possessed "a first class brain, the strength of an ox, and some ideals, but not too many."[1] The brevity of this remark, not less than the description itself, accurately evokes this reticent man. An impression of Robinson's individuality is conveyed by the phrasing of his memoranda, minutes and marginalia. Forceful and decisive, he was in advance of his time in insisting on the use of plain and accessible English in official prose.[2] 'Have you a maiden aunt? Then write this as though you were writing to her,' he once advised one of his private secretaries.[3]

To one of Robinson's colleagues, the permanent secretary 'had a mailed fist beneath a velvet glove - a hard man, but not

1 Dictionary of National Biography 1941-50, p. 729

2 loc. cit.

3 Interview with Baroness Sharp of Hornsey, 3 July 1980

without a sentimental side.'[1] To another he was something of a 'tyrant.'[2] He appeared at his hardest in dealing with his staff, both the individuals comprising it and as a corps. He was 'not at his best in establishment matters.'[3]

> 'Formal meetings of the (Whitley) Council used to be held once a quarter - on a Saturday morning - and long agendas were solemnly gone through to, as a rule, predestined conclusions.'[4]

He had little time for personnel questions, unlike his predecessor; and he never understood the disaffections of assistant principals and principals whose low salaries were not brightened by prospects of early promotion. 'On manners and morals, Sir Arthur's outlook was early Victorian.'[5] He was a stern disciplinarian. Trivial inefficiencies in the department might earn the officials concerned the punishment of a period on audit work; and if he came across what he regarded as sexual indiscretion, he could - and did - insist on the resignation of those involved.[6] The secretary's word

1 W A Ross 'Local Government Board and After: Retrospect' Public Administration xxxiv (1956), 22

2 Interview with Baroness Sharp of Hornsey, 3 July 1980

3 Dictionary of National Biography 1941-50, p. 729

4 Evelyn Sharp The Ministry of Housing and Local Government (London, 1968), p. 227

5 Ross op. cit., 22

6 Interviews with Baroness Sharp of Hornsey and Dame Enid Russell-Smith, 3 July and 15 April 1980 respectively

was law.

A generalist himself, Robinson was wary of subject specialists and an advocate of the art of administration learned by experience. He told the Tomlin Commission that he saw no good reason to admit social science graduates to the Ministry's administrative class. What was needed there was the specialist expertise that came from the first-hand experience of the day-to-day conduct of business. A detailed knowledge of particular issues was less important than an understanding of the ways in which the department worked. He spoke often of the need for principles. A new recruit to the higher division, he said once, 'has got to be able to grasp principles, and to see what is involved in a problem.'[1] Promoting an official to the rank of assistant secretary, Robinson is said to have advised: "stick to general principles, don't bother much about details."[2]

What Robinson meant by 'general principles' he nowhere clearly expressed.[3] His managerial style was its nearest

1 Royal Commission on the Civil Service 1929-31, Minutes of Evidence taken on the thirty-second day, Sir Arthur Robinson's reply to question 12692

2 Ross op. cit., 22

3 Much of the material for this and the following paragraphs is taken from interviews with Sir Arthur Rucker, Dame Enid Russell-Smith, and Baroness Sharp of Hornsey

exposition. He believed consistently that he was the Minister's sole adviser, and that departmental opinions offered to the political head should always be transmitted through the permanent secretary. The Ministry's other senior officials were excluded from direct participation in this process. The principal assistant secretaries ran their divisions almost as separate departments, reporting directly to the permanent secretary. They rarely, if ever, met each other to discuss official matters in conference with the department's assistant secretaries as happened in the Board of Trade. The Ministry remained fragmented. The insurance branch was physically and intellectually separate from the rest of the department. The ex-Insurance Commissions' staff continued to feel themselves superior to the old Local Government Board men. The medical side seldom played a part in the office's daily business that was perceptible to lay administrators. The historical accidents that had brought about these distinctive characteristics, which we examined in the first chapter, strengthened the managerial inclinations of the permanent secretary, and he did nothing to diminish or circumvent their impact.

There was little to challenge the authority of a strong-minded permanent secretary of a government department between the wars. The director of establishments, whose

responsibilities included the management of personnel and staff relations, might have balanced the secretary's views. This did not happen in the Ministry of Health. After 1924 and until 1937, the director was H A Leggett, an official said to be entirely in awe of Robinson. Moreover the practice of personnel management in the civil service was highly unsophisticated at this time. One director of establishments later wrote that:

> 'In the old days Establishment Officers did not perhaps do a great deal on the organisation side: in the main their job was to provide the bodies, to make promotions, to get rid of the black sheep, and to take responsibility for the premises for Common Services such as the Registry, the Typing Branch etc. Of course they brought a proper critical faculty to bear on demands for more staff, but there were then no such distinctions as O and M, Staff Survey, Welfare, Instructions, and so forth.'[1]

There was no general training policy in the civil service before 1939 except a belief that exposure to practical experience was all that was required. Standardised reporting of an individual's performance of his duties was introduced in 1922 but for a variety of reasons had little impact.

1 H V Rhodes 'The Director of Establishments and Organisation' Public Administration xxx (1952), 148

There was an 'office investigation' branch in the Treasury from 1919 but its interest was limited to the use of office machinery. In consequence the permanent secretary of a government department could be all-powerful in matters concerning personnel administration. This was the case at the Ministry of Health in the 1920s and 1930s.

A second potential for challenge to the permanent secretary's authority might have come from the private office of the Minister of Health, especially since there was a striking continuity of appointments in it. Douglas Veale, who became the Minister's private secretary in 1921, remained in the post until 1928. He was succeeded by Nevil Rucker who had been Veale's assistant in 1923-25 and 1927-28. Rucker left the Minister's private office eight years later, at the end of 1936. One of the permanent secretary's private secretaries believed that Robinson was concerned by these long enduring appointments.[1] Before 1924, with a rapid succession of Ministers, little could be done to break them for Veale's expertise was needed; and afterwards, Rucker's and Veale's personal popularity with Chamberlain prevented changes being made.

1 Interview with Baroness Sharp of Hornsey, 3 July 1980

In any case, their conduct ensured a concentration of power and advice at the hands of the permanent secretary. They themselves could be influential in the office hierarchy but only within clearly defined limits. P J Grigg, private secretary to the Chancellor of the Exchequer during the 1920s, has observed that in the interwar period:

> 'Private secretaries tended to be more senior in their departments and they were frequently promoted straight to Permanent or Deputy Secretaryships.'[1]

This may have been true of the Treasury: it was not of the Ministry of Health. Neverthless in a ministry with a small administrative class whose apex was disproportionally powerful, the members of the minister's private office could attain considerable significance.

Grigg has identified the source of private secretaries' influence. It derived not from the forceful expression of their own views but from confining their role 'to being an efficient link between the Minister and the machine.'[2]

> 'It was essential that the private secretary should not "shoot a line" of his own. He was never justified in revamping the work of his offical superiors.'[3]

1 P J Grigg Prejudice and Judgement (London, 1948), p. 53

2 ibid., p. 56

3 loc. cit.

A private secretary's importance to the official machine arose from his self-denial and self-effacement.

Neither Grigg at the Treasury nor Veale at the Ministry of Health were always restrained in their dealings with the ministers. Grigg recorded that 'many of my recollections are of heated and even violent arguments with Winston (Churchill).'[1] He was famous throughout the service for these disagreements. Relations between Neville Chamberlain and his private secretaries were less dramatic altogether. Veale would sometimes offer dissent though Chamberlain would seldom encourage it, and in any case the private secretary knew when to stop. Chamberlain apparently 'had a peculiar tilt to his chin and once that appeared you had gone as far as you could.'[2] Rucker, on the other hand, felt that it was not his job but the permanent secretary's to put the other side to the Minister's point of view.[3] Chamberlain and Rucker were in any case politically empathetic. Both Veale and Rucker were model private secretaries. They eased the workings of the official machine; and, at the Ministry of

1 Grigg op. cit., p. 176

2 Sir Douglas Veale interviewed by Dr B H Harrison, Corpus Christi College, Oxford, 14 January 1969

3 Sir Arthur Rucker interviewed by Dr B H Harrison, Corpus Christi College, Oxford, 19 May 1969

Health, that machine was personified in the permanent secretary, whose influence was the greater for the long duration of his appointment.

Continuity is one of the features most evident to the historian surveying the holding of senior positions in the civil service during the interwar years. By the time of his retirement in 1939, Creedy had been the permanent secretary of the War Office for fifteen years. Murray spent nineteen years at the head of the Admiralty. Fisher, permanent secretary to the Treasury and head of the home civil service, retained his influential position for twenty years before the outbreak of war. He was succeeded by Wilson, the chief industrial adviser to the government, who had first become a permanent secretary nearly twenty years before.

A similar state of affairs prevailed at the Ministry of Health. Robinson remained the permanent secretary for fifteen years; Newman the chief medical officer for sixteen; Kinnear the controller of insurance for seventeen; and Vivian the Registrar-General for twenty-four. Their junior colleagues often waited for a decade or more before promotion. North, who succeeded Vivian as Registrar-General in 1945, was an assistant principal for ten years and a principal for nine. Cross was an assistant secretary in the local government division for sixteen years; de Montmorency a

principal for fourteen; and Sheepshanks an assistant principal for eleven.[1]

Slowness of promotion was inevitable in a bureaucracy with a fixed number of senior posts. The extreme longevity of officials in the top ranks of the permanent and deputy secretaries, on the other hand, was a direct consequence of a pension system which encouraged service until the individual concerned reached his sixty-fifth birthday. Robinson did not retire until he was into his sixty-sixth year, and Vivian was sixty-five before he departed the Registrar-General's Office. Though the war may have extended their careers, it did not those of Newman and Kinnear for example, both of whom retired before its outbreak, the former aged sixty-five and the latter sixty-four. The more acute observers of civil service trends advocated changes in the pension system as the most effective means of breaking the power of the gerontocracy at the head of government departments' permanent staffs and thereby liberating younger officials from years of frustration in the inferior grades of the administrative class.[2] Beveridge neatly identified the problem:

1 See appendix three for the careers of selected senior officials in the Ministry of Health during the interwar years

2 Sir W H Beveridge 'The Civil Servant of the Future' The Development of the Civil Service (London, 1922)

> 'One of the inherent weaknesses of the Civil Service (is that) .... in normal times it does not give real responsibility to men soon enough in life.'[1]

Some civil servants saw advantages in this state of affairs. Sir Adair Hoare, a senior official of the Ministry of Pensions, argued in the mid-1920s that 'sound public administration' required 'continuity' and took comfort from the view that 'the necessary element of continuity has been secured in the Civil Service.'[2] Others also made a virtue of necessity. Questioned by members of the Tomlin Commission on promotion rates in the Ministry of Health, Robinson replied that an assistant principal could not expect to be advanced to principal in less than a decade.[3] He asserted that the assistant principal grade 'was intended to be, and is regarded as, a training grade for the higher administrative work of the Ministry.'[4] An assistant principal's duties were designed to give as wide an experience as possible of the department's activities, and

1 Sir W H Beveridge The Public Service in War and Peace (London, 1920) p. 41

2 Sir Adair Hoare 'Officials and Policy' Public Administration v (1927), 464

3 Royal Commission on the Civil Service 1929-31, Minutes of Evidence taken on the thirty-second day, Sir Arthur Robinson's reply to question 12691

4 Royal Commission on the Civil Service 1929-31, Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Health, paragraph 93, p. 798

accordingly members of this grade could be expected to be moved 'from one division to another in order to test them on entirely different types of work.'[1] This had the advantage of giving each assistant principal an opportunity to play 'a definite part' in the routine of the division to which he was attached.[2] In other words the training of entrants to the administrative class was limited to personal and practical experience, and the slowness of promotion justified and bolstered this approach. It is not surprising that pragmatism was the class' 'general principle.' It was only after the Second World War, which increased the size of the civil service and broke down some of its internal barriers and divisions, that more rigorous and theoretical training schemes were introduced.[3]

What effect did dim prospects of promotion have on members of the administrative class beneath the top two or three grades? Not suprisingly there is evidence that they wanted change. One of the Ministry of Health's inspectors, Millicent Murby, explained the deleterious consequences she

1 loc. cit. (It is not clear from the evidence that this actually was the practice)

2 loc.cit.

3 Report of the Committee on the Training of Civil Servants, May 1944 (Cmd. 6525): see especially paragraphs 20, 33 and 104

saw as deriving from a stasis in personnel, and suggested a remedy:

> 'Means should, however, be taken to secure change not merely of work but of personal environment. However attached one may get to old friends, they are not always the best permanent companions. One settles down: it is known what one can do, and there is no inclination to surprise by fresh efforts either oneself or anyone else.'[1]

She thought that members of the department should be moved about within it.

Broadley, formerly of the Board of Trade, advanced a solution more far-reaching than the regular playing of musical chairs. Promotion, he believed, might be made in the future not by strict adherence to meritocratic principles but by seniority and efficiency.[2] Others argued for sabbatical years, for training in general principles of public administration (a diploma in the subject had been set up in the early 1920s), and for the creation of a civil service college.[3] In these and in other ways, civil servants

1 Millicent Murby 'Routine and the Civil Service' in The Development of the Civil Service (London, 1922), pp. 162-3

2 H Broadley 'Promotion in the Civil Service' Public Administration' v (1927)

3 See appendix four

sought to enliven careers within their profession. These remarks and criticisms imply awareness of a certain narrowing of vision and of an administrative conservatism, and a desire to remove these characteristics. Beveridge was struck by the fact that officials seldom conducted comparability exercises. Civil servants involved with local government seemed to him not to have made comparisons with local government systems overseas.[1]

This isolation could be detected even within the government machine itself. Jameson, who became the Ministry of Health's third chief medical officer in succession to MacNalty and who, unlike his two predecessors, was appointed from outside the service, told a Treasury committee that on arriving in the department:

> '(He) had at once been impressed by (the fact that) departmental medical staffs worked as isolated units and hardly ever met. As a result, the Central Government's medical requirements were never looked at as a whole.'[2]

1 Sir W H Beveridge 'The Civil Servant of the Future' in The Development of the Civil Service (London, 1922). (G Montagu Harris, who worked in the Ministry of Health's intelligence branch, wrote a monograph with the title Local Government in Many Lands (1926), but this aimed only to bring together information obtained from the India Office, the Colonial Office and the Foreign Office at the request of Lord Onslow's Royal Commission on Local Government)

2 PRO, T 222/439: Committee on Civil Service Medical Staffs - Agenda and Minutes, evidence of Sir Wilson Jameson to the first meeting, 2 May 1949

The comment suggests that some ministries' permanent staff felt themselves to be self-sufficient, both in relation to each other and to the world outside.

In the Ministry of Health during the interwar years there was an atrophying of the formal means of contact with interested parties outside the machinery of central government. The five consultative councils, established with much publicity in 1919 as an integral feature of the new department, did some work in the early 1920s. The so-called Dawson Report was the most important of the councils' products, and indeed the only one to be published. Thereafter the councils fell, in the permanent secretary's words, 'into desuetude.'[1] The department's intelligence branch diminished in size during the period; and its head, at first of a rank equivalent to assistant secretary, became a principal. In 1935 the branch became part of a new directorate of intelligence and public relations; and two years later, with the return of the director to the department from which he had been borrowed, both responsibilities were added to those of the director of establishments. These developments, and indeed the reluctance with which the permanent secretary became involved in the mid-1930s with the concept of departmental public

1 PRO, MH 71/4: Sir Arthur Robinson to Arthur Greenwood, 10 June 1929

relations, indicate his - and thus to an extent the Ministry's - belief in its own self-sufficiency.[1]

Government departments can plausibly be seen as cohesive social entities. It is fashionable to analyse them in terms of a uniformity of social origin and educational experience of members of the administrative class. Certainly such uniformity existed. Of the twenty-four senior civil servants listed in appendix three, thirteen had been educated privately and no less than twelve had degrees from Oxford. Four had graduated from Cambridge and five were graduates of other British universities. But such an explanation relies on a comforting though misplaced faith that civil servants who have been educated in this way share a set of values and beliefs, that it does not change with the passage of time, and that in all circumstances it determines their official attitudes. It is a view that is improbable in each of its three elements.

What a ministry does have, on the other hand, is a distinctive bureaucratic culture that derives less from the social composition of its members than from the nature of their activities as a group. It is from the exercise of

1 PRO, MH 78/147: Sir Arthur Robinson to Sir Kingsley Wood, 5 July 1935 (a minute summarising Robinson's views on publicity and public relations)

their functions as the permanent staff of an agency of central government, not from the supposed prejudices that they may or may not bring to their work, that their attitude of mind is developed. This was especially potent in the years between the wars. The head of the civil service, Sir Warren Fisher, and other permanent secretaries propogated the notion of administration as a particular form of expertise on a par with that of scientists and other technically qualified members of the government's service. Fisher was an enthusiast for a civil service as a collection of generalist officials capable of turning their hands to any branch of the work of central government. It was during his time at the Treasury that the Civil Service Sports Council was established.[1] Its first chairman was Sir Aubrey Symonds, the Ministry's Second Secretary, whose 'energy and enthusiasm' are said to have 'contributed largely to .... the stimulation of Civil Service esprit de corps.'[2] It is in the 1920s and 1930s that civil servants wrote of themselves and of their colleagues as members of a service that transcended departmental divisions. This self-image is well summarised in Symonds' obituary notice: 'Sir Aubrey was not merely a departmental chief; he was a Service personality.'[3]

1 The Council was set up in 1922

2 The Times 25 March 1931

3 loc. cit.

That said, it is clear that there was a pronounced esprit de corps within the parts that made up the whole: that is, amongst the members of each department's permanent staff. The crucial element in this was the personality of the department's permanent head. His authority within his department, unchallenged by other members of it, enhanced by deliberate intent on the part of the Treasury, and strengthened by long service, was paramount. The Ministry of Health at this time well matches this model. Robinson is said once to have won a departmental golf tournament.[1] Can the symbolism have escaped his vanquished colleagues?

After 1920 the Ministry of Health became accustomed to decisive management from its permanent secretary. The concept of a corps d'elite arguing amongst itself and anxious to push its Ministers into acceptance of wide-ranging public health schemes, which had been advocated by Morant, was replaced by a monolithic and pyramidal administrative class with authority vested exclusively in its apex. Before 1924, with a rapid succession of Ministers, the political results in areas other then housing policy were insubstantial. With the appointment of Neville Chamberlain as Minister of Health in November 1924 and the prospect of his continuous tenure for a number of years, the legislative fruits alone would be considerable both in quantity and quality; and it is to his time at the department that we now direct our attention.

1 W A Ross op. cit., p. 21

CHAPTER 3

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN AS MINISTER OF HEALTH

1. Introduction

2. Apprenticeship: 1869 - 1922

3. Office: 1923 - 1929

4. Conclusion

1. INTRODUCTION

Neville Chamberlain was three times Minister of Health: between March and August 1923, from November 1924 until June 1929, and during MacDonald's first National Cabinet (August - November 1931). He played a leading part in the departmental consideration of policies, especially those relating to housing, before 1923, and between 1931 and 1935 when Sir Edward Hilton Young was the Minister.[1] By holding office as Minister of Health for over five years in all, and by wielding influence in the department's affairs at other times, Chamberlain occupied a significant position in the discussion of issues relating to public health and to local government during the greater part of the interwar period.

He did so not least because he was well suited to the Ministry both by temperament and by virtue of his background as a businessman and an elected member of Birmingham's city council. Characteristically he knew this himself.

> 'When I got to the Ministry of Health
> where I was already fairly familiar

1 Cambridge University Library, Kennet Papers: Chamberlain - Hilton Young correspondence

> with most of the subjects I thought I had at last got my opportunity.'[1]

Though he had been Chancellor of the Exchequer for the last months of Baldwin's first administration, he had not wished to return to the Treasury when the second was formed the following year. He wanted to be Minister of Health again: 'it follows naturally upon my training,' he told Baldwin.[2] He explained his reasoning to his stepmother in September 1923.

> 'I have always regarded the Treasury as altogether outside my line of country. Finance is not my subject and the game of putting spokes in other people's wheels is one which has no attractions for me. I was very happy at the Ministry of Health.'[3]

To his younger sister, Ida, he wrote:

> 'I might be a great Minister of Health but am not likely to be more than a second-rate Chancellor. I suppose my friends would be disappointed and think I had gone downhill if I returned to Health but that would soon pass off and I should be very happy to find myself there again.'[4]

1 Birmingham University Library, Neville Chamberlain Papers, NC 1/20/1/125: Neville to Mary Endicott Chamberlain, 8 September 1923

2 Cambridge University Library, Baldwin Papers Box 42: Chamberlain to Baldwin, 16 August 1923

3 NC 1/20/1/125: Neville to Mary Endicott Chamberlain, 8 September 1923

4 NC 18/1/457: Neville to Ida Chamberlain, 26 October 1924

Chamberlain's apparently relentless activity at the Ministry confirms the accuracy of his self-assessment. The outlines of the department's legislation whilst he was its Minister are well known. In November 1924, less than three weeks after the general election, he presented Cabinet with a programme of twenty-five bills, twenty-one of which had reached the statute book by the time the Parliament came to an end.[1] Other measures were added to the programme and also received the royal assent. The twelve bound volumes of acts and speeches presented to him and to his parliamentary secretary, Sir Kingsley Wood, by the Ministry's officials in June 1929 list twenty-three acts: five in 1923 and the remainder in what Sir Arthur Robinson, the department's permanent secretary, subsequently described as 'the second great term of service.'[2] This chapter considers the origins and the nature of Chamberlain's suitability for this ministerial appointment.

His political attitudes sprang from a highly developed consciousness of family duty - that morbid sense of honour characteristic of the Chamberlains on which contemporaries

1 Keith Feiling The Life of Neville Chamberlain (London, 1946), pp. 129, 461-2 (This legislation represented the full range of the department's responsibilities)

2 NC 11/15/100: Sir Arthur Robinson to Mrs Neville Chamberlain, 1 May (1942)

commented; and it is imperfectly understood without reference to the public life of Neville Chamberlain's father, Joseph. Their father's political actions and beliefs were personal yardsticks for his two sons. Both proudly regarded themselves as the personifications of filial obedience. Completing Joseph Chamberlain's initiatives, broken off by his withdrawal from politics in 1906, gave them particular pleasure, acknowledged openly - to Austen's evident approval - by Neville in his speech on import duties in February 1932.[1]

The influence of his father is only one of the ingredients now evident in the forming of Chamberlain's political attitudes. Chamberlain developed what he had acquired from father and family in ways that were shaped by his education in business, by his company directorships, and by his two successive elections to the Lord Mayoralty. It is a truism that his involvement in local government administration well qualified him to be Minister of Health; and, if detailed knowledge of its departmental responsibilites were the sole criterion, he had a better claim to the post than other senior Conservatives in Parliament. His expertise, an asset in the 1920s when he delivered the substance and Baldwin the rhetoric of 'new Conservatism,' became a facile target for

1 Hansard, 5th series, 1932, cclxi. 296

mockery after 1938 when he was caricatured as having looked at international affairs through a municipal drainpipe.

His appreciative understanding of the issues was clearly of crucial importance in his performance as the Ministry's political head: but not less significant was his justification for seeking election to Westminster. "I shall not enter parliament as a partisan," he told W A Cadbury in September 1917.[1] He wanted to achieve certain clearly defined ends: he was a politician who, more than most, wanted to get things done.

The ends were all within the field of social policy. A month before his death, Chamberlain wrote to Simon saying:

> 'It was the hope of doing something to improve the conditions of life for the poorer people that brought me at past middle life into politics.'[2]

Little else interested him. When he became an MP in 1918, he had no interest in foreign affairs or in economics. He was mystified by Austen Chamberlain's enthusiasm for the Foreign

1 Feiling op. cit., p. 80

2 Bodleian Library, Simon Papers: Neville Chamberlain to Viscount Simon, 6 October 1940. (Compare his similar comment nearly sixteen years before: 'I believe I may do something to improve the conditions for the less fortunate classes - and that's after all what one is in politics for.' Cambridge University Library, Baldwin Papers Box 42: Chamberlain to Baldwin, 7 November 1924)

Office. It was a department, he once observed dismissively, with virtually no legislation. Before 1929 he infrequently expressed views at length in his diary or in correspondence about subjects other than those that had to do with the Ministry of Health. He explained his feelings to his youngest surviving sister, Hilda, shortly after the announcement of his appointment in 1924.

> 'Of course the public thinks only of Housing, but I have told my people to make no mistake. If that had been the only problem I might not have chosen to come back but I want to take the opportunity of dealing with the big questions of rating and valuation, Poor Law, Pensions and Health Insurance, and the reorganisation of the medical services. It will be great fun...'[1]

His determination to deal with these 'big questions' demanded considerable talents in the drafting of legislation as well as a position in the Cabinet sufficiently influential to obtain the parliamentary time necessary for the introduction of the relevant bills. It required also a deep knowledge of the complex technicalities of local government and, at the same time, an ability to expound it lucidly before a Commons largely ignorant of and uninterested in the subject.

1 NC 18/1/462: Neville to Hilda Chamberlain, 1 November 1924

Chamberlain had these essential ministerial characteristics. This chapter describes the development of these skills and presents a synoptic not a piecemeal interpretation of Chamberlain's legislative programme during the parliament of 1924-29.

2. APPRENTICESHIP: 1869 - 1922

Arthur Neville Chamberlain was born on 18 March 1869, the eldest of Joseph Chamberlain's four children by his second wife, Florence Kenrick. There were two children from an earlier marriage to Florence's first cousin, Harriet Kenrick: Beatrice and Joseph Austen, seven and six years his senior respectively; and three younger sisters: Ida, Hilda, and Ethel. The Kenrick and the Chamberlain families were Unitarians, and they were much intermarried: Joseph's sister and his brother had Kenrick spouses. With other Nonconformist families in Birmingham - the Nettlefolds, the Martineaus, the Oslers, the Rylands, and others - they 'kept to themselves' and relied upon each other for their social lives. In Feiling's assessment:

> '(They were) conscious, self-conscious indeed, of their own integrity,'and repressive of their emotions, 'generations of enforced reserve having diluted and covered their passion with an ever-exercised self-respect.'[1]

This inward looking environment was the one in which Chamberlain spent his youth, and it generated a sense of duty to the family name (as to all who bore it) that never left him.

1 Feiling op. cit., p. 3

This commitment was not weakened by his marriage in 1911. Throughout his life weekly letters from Ida and Hilda reminded him of his heavy obligations as a Chamberlain. He replied with meticulous accuracy to the one in the first week and to the other in the second though both women shared a home. His wife had realised early in their marriage that she could not hope to match this exacting family custom of full and detailed letter-writing. Ida's 'capital long letter of the 28th. (January),' reaching Chamberlain on his honeymoon, filled Anne 'with despair,' he reported with naive amusement to its author.[1]

The correspondence with these two sisters - or, as they came to be known collectively after the birth of the Chamberlain's children, 'the aunts' - was often vigorously critical in tone. It was knowledgeable, too, for both women became active members of local authorities, and developed an interest in housing that was characteristically Chamberlainite. In the 1920s Chamberlain was never allowed to forget that he was the family's rising representative in public life and the one on whom the lustre of its name chiefly depended.

Significantly his only book was written chiefly out of family piety. It was a biography of a cousin, Norman Chamberlain, a

1 NC 1/16/2/39: Neville to Ida Chamberlain, 3 February 1911

Birmingham councillor and social worker, killed in action in December 1917. To Chamberlain, 'my dear friend Norman' was "the most intimate friend I had" and 'like a younger brother to me;' yet he justified writing of him not out of personal affection but because he was:

> 'Anxious that future generations of the family should realise how greatly Norman had contributed to the family fame.... He himself was devoted to the "clan," and no one was more fully conscious of the fine old maxim, Noblesse oblige.'[1]

Throughout his life, Chamberlain was to allow members of the 'clan' to scrutinise and criticise his political actions and opinions more readily than those outside it, even the closest of his colleagues.

Joseph Chamberlain was the dominant early influence within this tightly knit and introspective family. This had been his intention. The father had a strong dynastic sense, perceived clearly in the firm direction of his sons' adolescence. Austen, groomed for national politics, was Chancellor of the Exchequer within eleven years of his first election to Parliament. Neville was destined for a business career: education at Mason College, Birmingham was followed

1 NC 2/20 Diary 1913-22, entry dated 27 February 1918; Feiling op. cit., p. 77; NC 2/20 Diary 1913-22, entry dated 10 February 1918; Neville Chamberlain Norman Chamberlain (London, 1923), p. v

by apprenticeship to a firm of chartered accountants and then by sole responsibility for his father's bizarre and ultimately disastrous scheme to create a fortune from sisal grown on the Bahaman island of Andros. Joseph Chamberlain was wryly sensitive nevertheless to the ironies of parental compartmentalisation of children. Thomas Jones, the deputy secretary to the Cabinet before 1930, recorded having been told in 1937 that:

> 'Joseph Chamberlain had greater faith in Neville's future as a politician than in Austen's, and had summed up Austen's limitations by saying that he was born in a red box, brought up in one, and would die in one.'[1]

Both sons were willing actors in the dynastic succession. The parts they played were at first quite different ones for Austen's career at Westminster did not grow out of service on Birmingham City Council, as did those of his father and half-brother. Municipal government was a family interest and occupation for Joseph's daughters as for his sons.

Each contributed and was exposed to that:

> 'Certain, relatively unpartisan, tradition of Birmingham local administration, where ..... strong civic pride and sense of obligation

1 Thomas Jones CH A Diary with Letters 1931-1950 (London, 1964) p. 318

> .... was matched by an insistence on the highest standard of meticulous administration.'[1]

Joseph Chamberlain was elected a councillor in 1869 and Lord Mayor in three successive terms between 1873 and 1875. Neville joined the council in 1911, five years after his father's debilitating illness, finding as fellow councillors Norman Chamberlain and three uncles, two of them Kenricks. His colleagues elected him an alderman in 1914 and twice Lord Mayor in 1915 and 1916. On the second occasion he resigned within a month on being appointed Director-General of National Service.

Joseph Chamberlain's vigorous mayoralty was a decisive experience for his younger son, perhaps especially because he saw it only brightly through the prism of family memory. Even before his election, Joseph Chamberlain was planning the purchase of the city's two gas companies. The council approved the proposals in 1874. The income was considerable: a decade later the municipal gas undertaking had contributed almost £250,000 whilst reducing the cost of supply to the consumer by roughly 30%. Encouraged by favourable public response to the buying of the gas companies, justified by responsibility for public health, but chiefly following the

1 The Times 30 December 1983: obituary of Sir Lionel Russell, Chief Education Officer of Birmingham, 1946-68

mayor's lead, the city bought the Birmingham Water Works the following year. The resulting increase in revenue allowed his urban improvement scheme to go ahead. In his first two terms, Joseph Chamberlain had changed the mayor's role from a presiding chairman to the active champion of a new way of thinking about the nature and function of a municipal corporation.

The unoriginality of Joseph Chamberlain's views is now clear.[1] There were forty-nine municipal gas undertakings in England and Wales by 1870, four years before Birmingham gained its own, many of which had been obtained by the purchase of private concerns. Moreover Joseph Chamberlain was but the most prominent member of an industrial elite whose representatives, newly arrived on the city council, were more inclined to look coolly at large transactions and to spend considerable sums than had been the small businessmen they replaced. But no other member of the council rivalled the articulacy and the subversiveness of Joseph Chamberlain's views. He expounded his principles in December 1874.

> "In the first place I distinctly hold that all monopolies which are sustained in any way by the State ought to be in the hands of the representatives of the people - by the representative authority

1 E P Hennock Fit and Proper Persons (London, 1973); Asa Briggs History of Birmingham ii (Oxford, 1952)

should they be administered, and to them should their profits go, and not to private speculators. In the second place I am inclined to increase the duties and responsiblities of the local authority, in whom I have myself so great a confidence, and I will do everything in my power to constitute these local authorities real local Parliaments, supreme in their special jurisdiction."[1]

Neville Chamberlain inherited his father's political faith. He was never a Conservative. 'I was brought up a Radical,' he wrote in 1924, explaining to his wife why he had declined an invitation to speak on the historical contributions of Conservatism.[2] Thirteen years later, he could not resist the opportunity presented by his election as leader of the Conservative Party to remind his audience of his political origins, so different from their own.

> 'I recall that I myself was not born a little Conservative. I was brought up as a Liberal and afterwards as a Liberal Unionist.'[3]

It was as a Unionist that he had been elected to Parliament in 1918, as had his half-brother over twenty-five years earlier; and Unionist MPs they remained until their deaths.

1 Vote and Council Debate, December 1874, cited in Hennock op. cit., p. 120

2 NC 1/26/335: Neville to Anne Chamberlain, 10 August 1924

Both were supported by the Birmingham Unionist Association, a grouping which regarded itself as the independent expression of a city with a distinct and unique identity all its own.

Chamberlain was reassured throughout his career by similarities in thoughts and in deeds with those of his father.

> 'It is an interesting circumstance that, whatever I take up, seems to be a combination of my father's earlier ideas and plans. The Housing Act of 1923 amended and made operative the Small Dwellings Association Act which he got passed, I think in about 1898. The Pension Act, of course, completed his pioneer efforts; and now comes the reform of the Poor Law, which he was urging in '88.'[2]

When Austen sent him a copy of a letter written by Balfour to Salisbury in which the former described a conversation he and others had had with Joseph Chamberlain, the weekly letter to his sisters included the remark:

> '(Father's) observations on Poor Relief as a buffer against revolution seem opportune too at this moment. His

3 The Times 1 June 1937

2 NC L Add. 4: Neville Chamberlain to Sir Gilbert Barling Bt, 4 December 1928

> line of thought 40 years ago was just what mine is today.'[1]

To Austen, he replied:

> 'I was much interested in the observations .... about municipal ownership of land. I really was not aware that there was anything in the nature of policy in Father's mind but I long ago came to exactly the same conclusion myself independently and as it was one of the reasons why I am called a Socialist I am interested to find that I am only treading in Father's footsteps.'[2]

These comments need to be treated with caution. Can Chamberlain have been unaware of his father's enthusiasm for municipal landownership? It is hard to believe. The son shared the conviction, nevertheless, whether knowingly or unknowingly. In 1914 he had said:

> "A great many difficulties and much of the expense which is at present involved in town planning would be avoided if the land belonged to the corporation."[3]

The germ of this idea would surely have come from forgotten conversations in the Chamberlain household; but it would have been developed especially during membership of the city's

1 NC 18/1/522: Neville to Ida Chamberlain, 4 December 1926

2 NC 1/27/91: Neville to Austen Chamberlain, 4 December 1926

3 Briggs op. cit., p. 162

first town planning committee, of which Chamberlain became the chairman immediately on election as councillor for All Saints ward in 1911. There is thus a subliminal interplay between paternal inspiration and its subsequent elaboration that allowed the son to claim quite reasonably that responsibility lay either with his father or through his own efforts. The charge of socialism derives in essence from little more than antipathy to the Chamberlains' willingness to abandon laissez-faire principles. Contemporaries unused to powerful executives did not readily see a distinction between socialism and the municipalism of protectionists such as these.

> 'Socialism and protection have one feature in common: they both rest on the belief that the power of the State may be beneficially extended even though it conflicts with the contractual freedom of individual citizens. The protectionist and the socialist each renounce the trust in laissez-faire.'[1]

The interplay between father and son can be seen clearly in Chamberlain's concern for housing conditions. His father's improvement scheme of 1875-6 had been empowered by Cross' Artisans' and Labourers' Dwellings Act, passed in the previous year, in the drafting of which Joseph Chamberlain had been much interested. He was determined that his scheme

1 A V Dicey Law and Opinion in England (2nd ed., London, 1914), p. xxii

should not be limited to slum clearance but that, appealing to civic pride, it should include a planned rebuilding that would improve the city centre. The second stage of this scheme gives substance to a claim that Joseph Chamberlain was an early advocate of town planning, and it was a cause that his son also espoused. A list of books in Neville Chamberlain's library at Westbourne included Raymond Unwin's Town Planning in Practice (London, 1909) and C B Purdom (ed.) Town Theory and Practice (London, 1921).[1]

Neville Chamberlain was elected one of the first honorary members of the Town Planning Institute, formed in May 1914, and throughout his political career he was sympathetic to the new profession. His ideas were conventional yet few except qualified specialists made opportunities to promote them as assiduously as did Chamberlain. When elected Lord Mayor, Chamberlain declared that he wanted to use the position to advance:

> "That noble and fascinating ideal, the transference of the working classes from their hideous and depressing surroundings to cleaner, brighter and more wholesome dwellings in the still uncontaminated country which lay within our boundaries."[2]

1 NC 6/3/6: Index of Books in the Library of Neville Chamberlain MP at Westbourne, Edgbaston - December 1920

2 Iain Macleod Neville Chamberlain (London, 1961), p. 47

The need for determined municipal and private slum clearance was one of the foundations of Chamberlain's views on the housing question. Election to Westminster in December 1918 brought him opportunity to implement some of his ideas at a national level.

In 1919 Chamberlain accepted an invitation from Dr Addison, the Minister of Health, to become chairman of a newly established Unhealthy Areas Committee. The committee worked rapidly, producing an interim report in March 1920 and a final one thirteen months later. Chamberlain wrote to his sisters telling them that, as they may already have suspected, their brother had been largely responsible for its recommendations and that the committee had "simply opened its mouth and swallowed everything at a gulp."[1] On becoming Minister himself, Chamberlain was able to take the initiative. In 1927 he addressed the first meeting, called at his own instigation, of representatives from London County Council and its surrounding county and county borough councils at which he spoke of the need to "decentralise our great city" principally by establishing satellite towns.[2] This idea was subsequently developed by two important enquiries; and

1 Gordon E Cherry 'The Place of Neville Chamberlain in British Town Planning' in Cherry (ed.) Shaping an Urban World (London, 1980), p. 169

2 ibid., p. 174

their products, the Marley Report of 1935 and the Barlow Report of 1940, are influential landmarks in planning policy before and immediately after the Second World War. Migration remained one of Chamberlain's favourite policies, whether it was of slum dwellers to new towns or - as advocated by his cousin, Norman - of the unemployed to Canada.

Chamberlain owed much but not everything to inheritance. Many of his attitudes as Minister of Health were shaped by his first-hand experience in Birmingham as an employer no less than as an elected member of the city's council. He set up a pensions scheme at one of the two firms of which he became a director on his return from Andros in 1897. At the other he organised a surgery, welfare supervisors, and benefits for injured employees and their dependants. He approved of the Federation of British Industries' proposals for joint committees of managers and work-forces to manage benefits and pensions, and to formulate policy with majority decisions "binding on the whole trade, a favourite idea of my own," he claimed.[1] G D H Cole's Self-Government in Industry (a third edition had been published in 1918) was amongst his books at Westbourne.[2] Cadbury had similar schemes operating at its Bournville factory; and William Cadbury, who

1 Feiling op. cit., p. 79

2 NC 6/3/6: Index of Books in the Library of Neville Chamberlain MP at Westbourne, Edgbaston - December 1920

was to be a fellow councillor, was a friend close enough for Chamberlain to continue his regular correspondence with him after his departure for London at the end of 1916. Chamberlain's distrust of the political ambitions of organised labour sprang from the certainty of his faith in Liberal Unionism.

His address for the 1918 General Election declared:

> "I have repeatedly stated my conviction that we could best show our gratitude to those who have fought and died for England by making it a better place to live in. My sole reason for wishing to enter parliament is my desire to assist in bringing about this transformation."[1]

Minimum wages, pensions for the elderly and for widows, and state subsidies for housing and for health featured in his personal platform. Similar pledges were made up and down the country but Chamberlain's were buoyed with the confidence of practical and successful experience at local level.

His political opinions were moulded by his determination, learned as a businessman and as a councillor, to achieve clearly defined ends. These had to be identified precisely.

1 Feiling op. cit., p. 81

He firmly believed that a party in opposition must have a clear understanding of what it wanted to do in government. One would expect this of him: his father had flouted the Peelite convention that the duty of the opposition was to oppose government proposals rather than to articulate alternative programmes. "(If I were the Party Leader)," he wrote wistfully in the summer of 1924, "I should try to be prepared with information which would enable me to formulate a policy about everything."[1] This was not just a political tactic but was integral to his personality. He piously but truthfully told his stepmother:

> 'It is natural to me to desire above all things to do constructive work and to try and master all the relevent facts before beginning the construction.'[2]

It was a desire that endured until the end of his life. On his deathbed, he marked approvingly in his copy of Middlemarch Caleb's affirmation: 'you must have it in you that your plan is right, and that plan you must follow.'[3]

Chamberlain had been one of the most thorough and level-headed of the various Conservative policy advocates at

1 Feiling op. cit., p. 115

2 NC 1/20/1/125: Neville to Mary Endicott Chamberlain, 8 September 1923

3 Feiling op, cit., p. 456n

work between the break up of the Coalition and the Party's landslide victory at the 1924 General Election. He had promoted a number of ingredients for the 1922 manifesto: and he summarised in a pamphlet with the title Looking Ahead: Unionist Principles and Aims, published in June 1924, the findings of various policy committees, each under a shadow minister. In 1929 he formed the Conservative Research Department and became its first Chairman. He wanted it to be "at once an information bureau and a long-range research body;" and he immediately set up research committees and enquiries on a variety of subjects.

> "I am particularly pleased with the (one on agriculture), because hitherto all our investigations have simply endeavoured to find some vote-catching device. ...What we want is a survey of the whole position, which shall establish the proper proportions of the different kinds of farming."[1]

This comment pithily encapsulates Chamberlain's thorough and programmatic approach to politics, at once his greatest strength and defect.

Though the party's unity or its prospects of electoral victory were not irrelevant considerations in Chamberlain's preparation of legislative timetables, he was contemptuous of

1 ibid., p. 177

the near-sightedness of those who gave them pride of place in framing their political strategies. Writing to his wife in 1918, he declared his censorious disapproval of:

> "The old fogies who can't get away from the old habit of regarding the party as an end in itself, instead of an instrument for attaining ends of national importance."[1]

He wanted to lead his party onto new plateaus of reason and consensus; and he was to welcome the National government of 1931 as offering a chance:

> "That we may presently develop into a National Party and get rid of that odious title Conservative which has kept so many from joining us in the past."[2]

Party politics obscured the goals he had in sight. If he appeared to approach them slowly it was not because he did not see them clearly. The caution Churchill was to make fun of was his by deliberate artifice and not by temperament. This comment characterises his ministerial style:

> 'The simple fact is that I want the end I am working for so much that I am ready to be patient and perservering to get it.'[3]

1 ibid., p. 81

2 Macleod op. cit., p. 162

3 NC 1/26/434: Neville to Anne Chamberlain, 7 April 1931

His Liberal Unionist upbringing, proudly displayed, accentuated a separateness within his adopted party which other characteristics had already established. He was older than most first entrants to the House of Commons, and his background in local government and his methods of work set him apart from many of his colleagues. He was in any case reserved by nature, with little interest in political small-talk even if he allowed himself the time to indulge in it. He had political friendships, certainly: formal ones, as with his fellow Birmingham MPs; and some built on personal affection, as with Edward Wood and Baldwin and - in other parties - J H Thomas and Walter Runciman. But amongst his other Cabinet colleagues, he had no close friends after Wood's appointment as Viceroy in 1925. He was acutely sensitive to the criticism that in his parliamentary speeches he 'displayed the efficiency of well-tempered steel' yet made 'no appeal to human emotions:'[1] but he admired the debating skills of contemporary parliamentarians such as Churchill and Lloyd George without ever warming to the men who displayed them. Increasingly Chamberlain's political friendships were based on inequalities of age or ability with men younger than himself or with those content to follow his lead, an avoidable penalty even for one coming late to a parliamentary

1 Aberdeen Post and Journal 10 August 1925, a cutting from which is enclosed in NC I/26/352: Neville to Anne Chamberlain, 13 August 1925

career with a well developed political expertise often too freely exposed. Loyalty began to matter more to him than candour.

Chamberlain's conception of the purpose of political activity distanced him from less serious-minded colleagues but brought him close to his civil servants. He enjoyed departmental work. 'Lord! It is interesting being in office again,' he wrote in February 1925.[1] Four years later he mused: 'my pleasure is in administration rather than in the game of politics.'[2] His bureaucratic cast of mind was well suited to departmental work, and especially to that of a Ministry in whose responsibilities he was already well versed. In 1931, on becoming Minister for the third time, Chamberlain told his wife that he 'strolled into the Ministry of Health and rang for Rucker (his private secretary during his last months there) as if I had never been away.'[3] The department was his spiritual home.

1 NC 18/1/472: Neville to Ida Chamberlain, 8 February 1925

2 NC 18/1/656: Neville to Ida Chamberlain, 2 May (actually 2 June) 1929

3 NC 1/26/450: Neville to Anne Chamberlain, 26 August 1931

His officials had great respect for him. He reported that one of his private secretaries had told him:

> "The worst of trying to brief you is that we never can tell you anything you don't know already."[1]

The head of the Ministry's audit division was said to have described Chamberlain as the first minister in his experience since Samuel to be "a master of detail" and to have also "the grasp of the big principles."[2] As the 1929 general election approached, Chamberlain told his sisters that Sir Arthur Robinson had remarked:

> "We shall have to start in an entirely new atmosphere. We have all got used to a situation in which the Minister does things better than we do, but it will be very different when we get a new man here."[3]

Conventional flattery, perhaps: but not all ministers are praised by their officials, and the form in which it is expressed is significant in itself. Chamberlain was lauded for the extent to which he exhibited virtues civil servants themselves possessed, notably for the thoroughness of his knowledge of intricate subjects. Officials accepted him on their own terms.

1 NC 18/1/487: Neville to Ida Chamberlain, 23 May 1925

2 NC 1/26/372: Neville to Anne Chamberlain, 14 October 1926

3 NC 18/1/654: Neville to Ida Chamberlain, 18 May 1929

Chamberlain identified himself with the Ministry's work. As Sir Douglas Veale, his private secretary in 1923 and from 1924 until 1928, recalled in 1969:

> 'He wasn't much given to general conversation about politics. He was wholly committed to the Ministry of Health; and he would talk about his political views but always in relation to that and not to general politics.'[1]

Chamberlain's role in the department was essentially primus inter pares. Some of his contributions to the office's work were points of detail usually left to civil servants. For example, he recorded in 1926 that 'Robinson (his permanent secretary) was pleased with my redraft of the memo. for Winston on Housing Subsidy.'[2]

During his first period as Minister, he told his wife that on his way to Scotland for a holiday he had been grappling with rent restriction.

> 'I wrote a letter to Robinson giving him an outline of procedure which occurred to me during the night in the train! I shall be interested to hear what he thinks of it but it seemed to

1 Dr B H Harrison, Corpus Christi College, Oxford: tape-recording of an interview with Sir Douglas Veale, 14 January 1969

2 NC 1/26/372: Neville to Anne Chamberlain, 14 October 1926

> me rather a brilliant idea for simplifying and reducing the work of the rent courts.'[1]

Chamberlain was intellectually at one with his officials.

When Symonds, the second secretary, left the department in 1925, Chamberlain regretted his departure:

> 'Not least because his mind works so closely with mine that over and over again we have hit on the same idea independently.'[2]

Ministries do not always harbour contented teams of politicians and officials, working in unison for coherent and agreed objectives. Policies appear often to emerge from departments as the battered products of adversarial relationships either with civil servants on one side and ministers on the other or with groups of officials competing with each other for their minister's support. Chamberlain's experience was a different one.

He liked civil servants to be in agreement with him and, like many ministers, he made some effort to remove those with whom it seemed clear that he would never have an effective rapport. H W S Francis, the head of the poor law division, who had allegedly been brought up in the tradition of 'on the whole,

1 NC 1/26/318: Neville to Anne Chamberlain, 3 April 1923

2 NC 18/1/471: Neville to Hilda Chamberlain, 1 February 1925

grind the faces of the poor,' was by-passed because Chamberlain apparently 'regarded him as entirely out of sympathy with the kind of reforms he wanted to do.'[1] That is not to say that he preferred officials who habitually deferred to his opinions. On the contrary: one of his private secretaries believed that 'he would have been very cross with one if one hadn't put the other side.'[2] But Chamberlain would take disagreement 'pretty well' only if he was sure that he and his critic had common objectives in view.[3] It was in any case said to be 'extremely difficult to shift him out of any preconceived ideas that he had;' and if he suspected a difference in aims, he was scarcely prepared to listen.[4] He was thus predisposed to accept advice readily from his officials, just as he accepted criticism from his family, because he knew that they were on his side; and, by the same token, he was much less receptive to comment from sources outside the department. Especially was this the case so far as his own backbenchers were concerned, for to them he looked chiefly for unqualified support. He had little time for the Labour Party, though he

1 Harrison op. cit.

2 Dr B H Harrison, Corpus Christi College, Oxford: tape-recording of an interview with Sir Arthur Rucker, 19 May 1969

3 The description is Sir Douglas Veale's

4 The assessement is Sir Douglas Veale's

respected some members of it, notably George Lansbury and J H Thomas.[1]

In return Chamberlain was loyal to those of his officials whom he trusted. We have seen that there were already indications in the 1920s that loyalty was beginning to assume the importance in his working relations that his premiership was to make infamous. Three of the department's officials were subsequently to be singled out by him for especially senstive or important duties. He appointed Sir Arthur Robinson the Chairman of the Board of Supply when it was set up, and permanent secretary in 1939 on its upgrading to a ministry. Rucker, whom Chamberlain had made his assistant private secretary in 1925 and, three years later, his private secretary, was summoned to Downing Street in the same role in 1939. Strohmenger, the Ministry's accountant-general, was sent to the Unemployment Assistance Board on its creation in 1934.

A further explanation for the closeness of Chamberlain's working relations with his departmental staff is that he was well known to them even before his first appearance as a

1 Dr B H Harrison, Corpus Christi College, Oxford: tape-recording of an interview with Sir Douglas Veale, 14 January 1969; NC 2/21: Diary 1922-26, entry dated 20 February 1925

Minister in 1923. A number of appointments before he joined the government in October 1922 as Postmaster-General gave him ample cause to work in the department and to endure the spartan lunches there which, he wrote, "have the merit of being soon over."[1] In 1921 he became a member of the Ministry's Royal Commission on London Government. He earned extravagant if perhaps double-edged praise in its report:

> 'For the readiness with which he placed at our disposal his special knowledge of some of the most important problems with which we have had to deal.'[2]

He became the chairman of a committee on canals and a member of the Ministry of Health's consultative council on local health administration. His first private member's bill - on the legitimation of bastard children - won a second reading without government support, and this indicated the respect in which he was held even as a back-bencher.

It was for his expert opinion on housing matters that his advice was sought most frequently. His maiden speech - 'quite a success,' he believed - had been on rent restriction.[3] A year later Chamberlain reported to Hilda that

1 Feiling op. cit., p. 90

2 Report of the Royal Commission on London Goverment (Cmd. 1830) Parl. Papers 1923, xii pt. i. 581

3 NC 1/26/164: Neville to Anne Chamberlain, 10p.m. 11 March 1919

Bonar Law had attempted to lure him into the government by an offer of the Health under-secretaryship; but the prospect of association with Lloyd George made refusal inevitable for Chamberlain had not forgiven him for - as he saw it - letting him down during his Director-Generalship of National Service.[1]

Bonar Law continued to seek Chamberlain's advice informally. In June 1920, for example, Anne Chamberlain learned that her husband had been consulted by him on rent restriction.[2] His diary and his correspondence record regular visits to Sir Arthur Griffith-Boscawen, who had become Minister of Health in October 1922. Chamberlain was the Minister's heir-apparent; and his replacement of Griffith-Boscawen in March made de jure what had become - so far as housing policies were concerned - de facto.

1 NC 18/1/248: Neville to Hilda Chamberlain, 13 March 1920

2 NC 1/26/201: Neville to Anne Chamberlain, 18 June 1920

3. OFFICE: 1923 - 1929

Appropriately it was the issue of rent decontrol that was chiefly responsible for bringing Chamberlain into the department as its Minister. Griffith-Boscawen, his predecessor, had lost his seat in the general election. He failed to hold Mitcham at a by-election on 3 March, possibly the eighteenth candidacy sought for him.[1] The prospect of rent decontrol has rightly been held to have been responsible for the defeat.[2] Not less significant was the government's inability to adhere consistently to a policy to fulfil the commitment it had given to lift rent restriction. Having announced that it would decontrol the highest rentals in 1923, the next highest in the following year, and the remainder in 1925, the Cabinet allowed Griffith-Boscawen to declare that the two highest classes would not be decontrolled until 1924. Even then he assured his electorate that the implementation of this revised policy would depend on the building of a sufficient number of houses.[3]

1 Bodleian Library, Sir Robert Sanders Diary 1910-35, entry dated Sunday 28 January (1923)

2 A J P Taylor English History 1914-1945 (Harmondsworth. 1970), p. 265n; John Ramsden The Age of Balfour and Baldwin 1902-1940 (London, 1978), p. 172

3 Sanders op. cit., entry dated Saturday 24 February (1923)

Other factors played parts in Griffith-Boscawen's defeat. Not a popular MP, he had lost Dudley at a by-election in March 1920 and gained a reputation as an indifferent candidate. At Mitcham he found himself standing against an independent Conservative candidate, allegedly financed by Oliver Locker-Lampson, a coalitionist who had been Austen Chamberlain's parliamentary private secretary between 1919 and 1922.[1] In the event the independent Conservative attracted sufficient votes to let in the Labour candidate. Though the seat returned to the Conservative fold at the subsequent general election nine months later, Griffith-Boscawen's parliamentary career was at an end. Division within the scarcely reunited party - or, put another way, enduring loyalty to Austen Chamberlain - may have had some small influence in making his half-brother Minister of Health.

Once at the Ministry, Chamberlain learned at first hand just how intractable a problem rent restriction was. He had thought Griffith-Boscawen's original progressive decontrols 'very satisfactory.'[2] Now he and his officials devised a system of rent courts only to find that of five Cabinet

1 ibid., entry dated Friday 2 March (1923)

2 NC 1/26/312: Neville to Anne Chamberlain, 23 January 1923

committee colleagues:

> 'Not one had a good word for it. Perhaps when they have thought it over once more they will see better the difficulty of finding an alternative.'[1]

Chamberlain revised the courts' procedure, but in the end fell back uneasily on maintaining the status quo, making it palatable to himself by expressing the view that 'I should then have the field open for rent courts or anything else' in the following year.[2] Probably he realised now, as had Griffith-Boscawen, that rent decontrol would remain politically controversial until a substantial number of new houses were available. It was in this spirit that Chamberlain introduced the Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest Restrictions (Continuance) Bill on 2 May.

It was followed by the Rent and Mortgage Interest (Restrictions) Bill, which embodied the policy Chamberlain had known for some time to be necessary. It was, he told the Commons on 6 June:

> 'The third Measure of first class importance which it has been my duty to submit to the House during the short period which I have held office.'[3]

1 NC 1/26/317: Neville to Anne Chamberlain, 30 March 1923

2 NC 1/26/318: Neville to Anne Chamberlain, 3 April 1923

3 Hansard, 5th series, 1923, clxiv. 2225

The bill had two parts, the second being activated only on the expiry of the first. Control was extended for a further two years, partial decontrol commencing from 1925 and continuing over the course of the following five years. This approach to the problems posed by the lifting of rent restriction had a strong resemblance to the bill Griffith-Boscawen had intended to introduce and, as we have seen, Chamberlain had been closely involved in its drafting. But the first part of Chamberlain's bill offered the reassurance of the continuance of controls without which derestriction on its own was politically controversial, as Griffith-Boscawen had discovered.

The chief feature of Chamberlain's first period at the Ministry was the Housing Act, 1923. Under it the department stipulated architectural standards for new houses, providing a subsidy of £6 per house for twenty years for those local authorities submitting schemes of the requisite quality for the Minister's approval before October 1925. The time limit was later extended to 1929 at the lower rate of £4 per house. By that year, 438,000 houses had been constructed under the 1923 Act: 363,000 by private builders and 75,000 by local authorities themselves. It was to prove by far the most productive piece of housing legislation of the interwar period.

A feature of the act, subsequently little emphasised, was its provision of a second subsidy of half the cost of slum clearance. Its inclusion bears the clear stamp of Chamberlain's own advocacy. His enthusiasm for slum clearance and town planning bubbled through the drafting discussions. Once again, these had been begun by his immediate predecessor, but Chamberlain had been closely involved in the process. He had been 'very much disappointed,' he told his wife, by a memorandum Griffith-Boscawen had had prepared because 'he appeared to have given up all idea of a policy for slums.'[1] Considering such a policy in the department, Chamberlian criticised the Ministry's officials for supporting 'a very jejune suggestion by a medical officer' by which local authorities would prepare town planning schemes, giving owners of property within the area concerned a definite time in which to carry out the work involved.[2] The department's accountant-general, Strohmenger, had the idea of encouraging construction by rate relief of new houses, but Chamberlain had little sympathy for this proposal. 'B(oscawen) was hot foot for (it) until I spoke and then he was plunged into gloom.'[3]

1 NC 1/26/308: Neville to Anne Chamberlain, 1 January 1923

2 NC 2/21: Diary 1922-26, undated entry (early January 1923)

3 NC 1/26/309: Neville to Anne Chamberlain, 8 January 1923

By January, Chamberlain was able to report to his wife that 'the scheme finally fixed on is broadly speaking what I have advocated.'

> 'We say to the local authorities, Here is the assistance we are going to give, so much a house for so many years. You can use it to build houses with yourselves or to give subsidies to private builders or to help building societies at your own discretion. Provided you build the right kind of house (for size) you can have a free hand as to the plans and construction.'[1]

This formed the essence of the bill introduced by Chamberlain on 24 April, which became in due course the Housing Act, 1923.

The 1923 Act was clearly very much Chamberlain's own work, and it had been shaped by his understanding of the consequences of Addison's Housing and Town Planning Act, 1919. Chamberlain, at this time unsympathetic neither to Addison nor to the 1919 Act, nevertheless firmly appreciated the necessity of imposing a well defined ceiling on the costs to the Exchequer. The lesson of the 1919 Act, he said, was that we cannot mobilise our resources 'in the twinkling of an eye.'[2] Accordingly he specified in his bill the subsidy the Chancellor would meet, something that Addison had

1 NC 1/26/312: Neville to Anne Chamberlain, 23 January 1923

2 Hansard, 5th series, 1923, clxiii. 308

deliberately not done. Chamberlain adroitly told the Commons that 'I have enough experience of local authorities to know that the best of them are not so careful' with central subventions from taxation as with revenues derived principally from their own rates.[1]

Chamberlain insisted on a further check on expenditure by providing the limited subsidy only for local authorities and not, as under the 1919 Act, to private builders as well. The need to include it in the bill reflected his awareness that parliamentary opinion would not now tolerate another open-ended financial commitment such as the one that had operated under the Addison Act. Only its form stemmed from his belief in the effectiveness of local government. Chamberlain sought to enourage private builders to cover the whole field of housing under the supervision of the local authorities. He stipulated that his department would accept schemes from them only if they were improvements on equivalent proposals from private builders. Moreover he recognised his debt to the 1919 Act in the regeneration of the construction industry it had prompted and on which he was now able to capitalise. It meant that, he told the House:

> 'The only question left for me to decide was, what was the smallest subsidy which we must give, in order

1 ibid., 318-9

> to obtain the hearty co-operation of the local authorities, upon which we have to rely to carry out our programme.'[1]

He nevertheless shrewdly confessed to a lack of ambition for his bill. It should be regarded, he said:

> 'Not as a solution of the housing problem, but as the beginning of a solution; not as the engine itself but as the starting apparatus which will put the engine in motion.'[2]

Chamberlain introduced two further bills during his first period as Minister of Health. The Local Authorities (Emergency Provisions) Bill, a minor but urgent piece of legislation, was of no significance. He warned the House:

> 'It is a very short Bill. On the other hand, it makes up for its want of length by its extraordinary dullness.'[1]

On the other hand, the Agricultural Rates Bill was one of his three measures of 'first class importance.'[4] Its significance lay less in what it did than in what it presaged. The bill itself was ostensibly mundane, increasing

1 ibid., 311

2 ibid., 308

3 ibid., clxii. 81

4 ibid., clxiv. 2225

agricultural rate relief from the 50% introduced in 1896 to 75%. On the earlier occasion relief had been prompted by the report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture. In a similar way Chamberlain's 1923 bill implemented the recommendations of a tribunal of economists appointed by Lloyd George. In his speech on the second reading, the Minister indicated his wish to reform the rating system as a whole and not piecemeal. This bill, he conceded, had nothing to do with that reform, though reform had long been thought necessary. The bill assisted agriculture, and it was merely a temporary measure pending the introduction of legislation to reform the system of valuation and rating throughout the country as a whole. These comments are characteristically Chamberlainite, revealing his determination to tackle 'the big questions,' and a tactical skill in appeasing his party's agricultural interest before grappling with the acutely controversial subject of a nation-wide reform.[1]

By the time of his appointment on 27 August as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Chamberlain had done much to justify the reputation he had early gained amongst members of the Labour party. Kirkwood, intervening in the debate on the Housing Bill, acknowledged the respect in which his own colleagues

1 NC 18/1/462: Neville to Hilda Chamberlain, 15 November 1924

regarded Chamberlain:

> 'I have been told by many of my friends on this side of the House that the Minister of Health whom I would have to deal with was the best Minister of Health we have yet evolved.'[1]

This sentiment was echoed more than once by members responding to Chamberlain's second reading speeches, especially those dealing with the technicalities of local government. On these occasions, his lucid introductions were praised by the few members who themselves understood the questions at issue and the details involved. After his speech on the Valuation (Metropolis) Amendment Bill, 1925, for example, Sidney Webb congratulated Chamberlain on 'a masterpiece of exposition.'[2] Naturally praise of this kind did not muzzle expressions of dissent from the opposition benches or, indeed, from those sitting behind him; but Chamberlain's command of the details and principles of the legislation he presented and of the subjects it addressed was never doubted.

Chamberlain's second period at the department began in November 1924. In his fifty-four months of office, twenty-eight bills sponsored or supported by the Ministry

1 Hansard, 5th series, 1923, clxiii. 376

2 ibid., clxxxi. 140

received the royal assent. They were introduced for a host of reasons: the need to consolidate previous enactments, to give effect to the recommendations of committees of enquiry or to expert opinion, and to implement government policies are prominent among them. The quantity of legislation may be explained by the security of the government's majority and the administrations's longevity, but also by Chamberlain's pre-eminence in Cabinet.

Summarised, much of the department's legislation has a piecemeal, patchwork quality. Bills on public health and on the registration of midwives and maternity homes, on mental deficiency and on the adulteration of food and drugs do not appear to add up to a coherent policy or set of policies; but seldom is this the experience of governments even of similar duration. The bills in this category were all valuable, incremental measures in their own right of the kind that departments led by sympathetic and energetic ministers working with large goverment majorities are content to see implemented. This was especially the case with the Ministry of Health at this time, given the backlog of legislation that political vicissitudes over the preceding postwar years had allowed to build up.

The Public Health (Smoke Abatement) Bill, 1926 was part of that backlog. This was the last of four bills enacting the

recommendations of a departmental committee chaired by Lord Newton which had reported in 1921. During the debate, Sir Alfred Mond said:

> 'I want to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister of Health in occupying a position which I might well have occupied myself, for I remember very well that this bill was one of the Measures which my Department was considering when I was still in office.'[1]

Nevertheless it is possible to discern, side by side with bills like this one, major pieces of legislation forming an interlocking programme culminating in the Local Government Bill, 1928.

The existence of such a programme is well known though its contents are not. It dated from 1923. Sir Arthur Robinson, the Ministry's permanent secretary, later recalled that on the new Minister's arrival he had been asked for 'a four years programme of the legislation I would like to see passed.'[2] It depended 'largely on the personality of the Minister,' Chamberlain explained in a letter to his step-mother, and on the time available before the goverment fell

1 Hansard, 5th series, 1926, cxcvii. 286

2 NC 11/15/100: Sir Arthur Robinson to Mrs Neville Chamberlain, 1 May (1942)

or the Minister moved from the department.[1] When in August it was announced that Chamberlain would shortly be transferred to the Treasury, he reported to his step-mother that 'all my people (at the Ministry of Health) are in despair.'

> 'They have torn up their sketch programmes and find it difficult to adjust their minds to the old grooves out of which they fancied they had burst at last.'[2]

On Chamberlain's return the following year, it took only a fortnight for the department's civil servants to retrieve the pieces and for the Minister to present Cabinet with his resurrected "provisional programme of legislation, ... a connected series of reforms spread over a period of 3 to 4 years."[3]

The programme consisted of twenty-five bills. It included three bills consolidating previous legislation (on housing, town planning, and public health) and three more giving effect to the recommendations of royal commissions (on local government areas, national health insurance, and lunacy).

1 NC 1/20/1/125: Neville to Mary Endicott Chamberlain, 8 September 1923

2 loc. cit.

3 Feiling op. cit., p. 459

There were other measures continuing or modifying enactments already in existence. Amongst all these were several substantial bills. In 1925 or 1926 Chamberlain hoped to introduce a bill "to reform the present system of rating and valuation in England and Wales."[1] The following year he proposed to reform the Poor Law and to establish contributory pensions for widows and for those aged 65 and over. The most important item in the programme for 1927 was the reform of local taxation, which was to include a revision of the system of Exchequer grants.

Little of this was novel. Chamberlain himself recognised this, and he used the unoriginalities of his provisional programme to his advantage. In the note that prefaced his submission to Cabinet, he observed that there was already substantial agreement over the need to reform the Poor Law:

> "All the political parties have repeatedly subscirbed to the doctrine of Poor Law Reform, and the late government under Parliamentary pressure appointed a Cabinet Committee which instructed the Ministry to prepare a detailed scheme."[2]

1 ibid., p. 461

2 ibid., p. 459

Chamberlain pointed out that a rating and valuation bill had been prepared and circulated to the local authorities' associations more than a year earlier, and that all that now remained to be done was for it to be introduced as quickly as possible.

It is thus clear that part at least of Chamberlain's provisional programme was composed of legislation that derived less from the efforts of the party in opposition or of the Minister himself than from the work of previous administrations. One of his private secretaries went so far as to claim that:

> 'In all Neville Chamberlain's activities at the Ministry of Health, he didn't do anything that wasn't, so to speak, on the stocks already.'[1]

This is misleading without careful qualification. The 1925 contributory pensions bill, for example, was not part of the corpus of draft legislation available to a Minister of Health in 1924 on which a degree of political consensus had already been obtained. Though the concept of pensions financed from contributions was not novel in the 1920s, a scheme to implement them had not been agreed. It could not thus be said to be 'on the stocks' in the same sense as, for example, the reform of the system of rating and valuation.

1 Dr B H Harrison, Corpus Christi College, Oxford: tape-recording of an interview with Sir Douglas Veale, 14 January 1969

Chamberlain declared 'something of an hereditary interest' in the question.[1] His father had been a proponent of the contributory principle since 1891 and looked with confidence in a parliamentary speech in 1906 to its introduction in the near future. Paternal authority was one of the impulses behind Chamberlain's determination to devise a workable scheme; but the scheme itself, the product of a committee chaired by Chamberlain and assisted by the Liverpool actuary, Duncan Fraser, which had been working on the subject in 1923 and 1924, was essentially his if it was the product of the efforts of any individual.

Asked to identify Chamberlain's unique contribution as Minister of Health, Veale described his achievement as being the welding together of a great many pieces of legislation into a single, coherent policy.[2] But the thinking on which that policy was based is nowhere concisely expressed. Chamberlain wrote two pamphlets for the Conservative Party whilst at the Ministry. Both explain legislation.[3]

1 Hansard, 5th series, 1925, clxxxiv. 73

2 Dr B H Harrison, Corpus Christi College, Oxford: tape-recording of an interview with Sir Douglas Veale 14 January, 1969

3 Conservative Party Archives, Bodleian Library: Neville Chamberlain Widows' Pensions (Unionist Workers' Handbooks no. 6, 1924) and The Housing Question (Unionist Workers' Handbooks, no. 10, 1924)

This is appropriate. Unlike Baldwin, he had no interest in printing reflections on political philosophy or principles. They would, in any case, have made explicit his separateness within his adopted party. He regarded his legislative record as the surest summary of his thinking. But only very occasionally do his parliamentary speeches contain indications of political beliefs. His comments therein are necessarily adapted to the needs of the moment and are as frequently misleadingly unexceptional. For example, on the Widows' Orphans' and Old Age Contributory Pensions Bill, Chamberlain said:

> 'Our policy is to use the great resources of the State, not for the distribution of an indiscriminate largesse, but to help those who have the will and desire to raise themselves to higher and better things.[1]

One theme does emerge from a thorough analysis of the Ministry of Health's legislation during the period 1924-29. Chamberlain clearly believed strongly and consistently in the effectiveness of local goverment as the best means of providing the individual citizen with the wide range of services of which he had - or might have - need. But he recognised, as had others before him, that not every unit of local government was a suitable agent. Parishes and many urban and rural districts were too small to generate adequate

1 Hansard, 5th series, 1925, clxxxiv. 92

administrative expertise or responsible public support. County and county borough councils, on the other hand - 'the real living bodies of today,' Chamberlain called them[1] - were the ones on which he concentrated during the 1920s. They were the recipients of the 1923 housing subsidy. In 1925 the Rating and Valuation Act, and two years later, in the Nursing Homes Registration Act, the county and county borough councils were made the responsible authorities. Block grants, offering a diminution of central government's supervision of local authorities' spending, were a necessary adjunct to this policy, bringing closer the prospect of that "increase in (their) duties and responsiblilities," thereby turning local authorities into "real local Parliaments," of which his father had spoken.[2]

These changes, almost insignificant and thus scarcely controversial in themselves, paved the way for the reform of the Poor Law. County and county borough councils' committees had been the designated agents of boards of guardians' functions in both of the two reports of the 1905-09 royal commission; but for twenty years the response was studied inaction. Chamberlain's apparently piecemeal legislation

1 ibid., clxxxiii. 1877

2 Hennock op. cit., p. 120

increased the significance of these councils within the structure of local government in areas which were not politically controversial, and thereby made the reform of the Poor Law along a similar principle seem to be but the final phase of an inexorable progress. That final phase is the subject of the following chapters.

4. CONCLUSION

Neville Chamberlain's performance at the Ministry of Health has been eulogised more frequently that it has been examined. Taylor, for example, thought Chamberlain 'the most effective social reformer of the interwar years.'[1] 'He did more to improve (local government) than any other single man in the twentieth century.'[2] He has been seen as an energetic minister and as the personification of administrative efficiency. He was, we are told:

> 'A pragmatist through and through, and a man whose whole political instinct was for the means of solving obvious problems rather than the steady contemplation of distant ends.'[3]

This is merely a sophisticated way of saying that he was a successful parliamentarian.

Blake cast him too readily in the mould of Disraeli's Home Secretary, Sir Richard Cross, believing him - like Cross - 'responsible for a whole series of very important piecemeal

1 A J P Taylor English History 1914-1945 (Harmondsworth, 1970), p. 303

2 ibid., p. 235

3 John Ramsden The Age of Balfour and Baldwin 1902-1940 (London, 1978), p. x

reforms in this very important area of goverment.'[1] Ramsden observed that 'Chamberlain had been passing bills each session;' and Taylor, hinting at the expertise and consciousness of duty which historians have hitherto regarded as his sole claim to fame before 1937, added that Chamberlain 'knew his business and supplied, as before, the creative element in the government.'[2]

These assessments suggest that Chamberlain produced the substance and Baldwin the rhetoric of the 'new Conservatism' of the 1920s. The rhetoric is accessible and comprehensible, but it has little to do with the precise definition of goverment actions. Its most recent characterisation is convincing: ordinary, moral, unprovocative, English and professional.[3] The substance, as a coherent if multi-faceted whole, is elusive.

The government in November 1924 had no more of a binding programme than on other occasions. Its manifesto at the general election had emphasised the importance of social policies by making commitments in juvenile unemployment,

1 Robert Blake The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill (London, 1972), p. 228

2 Taylor op. cit., p. 284

3 Ramsden op. cit., pp. 208-215

agriculture, education and in a variety of issues to do with women and children. Housing, slum improvement, insurance for old age and widows' pensions gained separate paragraphs.[1] Nevertheless the manifesto was a reflection of the party's new belief in its popular representativeness and not a statement of radical departure from its traditional politics. It wisely offered the electorate a tessellation of incremental reforms and not an interlocking agenda for fundamental change.

Whilst much of the Ministry of Health's legislation during this government was as piecemeal and incremental as that of many other goverments, we have seen that some elements of it depended on others. The summation was the Local Government Bill, 1928 which distributed the Poor Law amongst the county and county borough councils along the lines of the Maclean committee's report ten years earlier. The bill had been preceded by consolidation of the Poor Law by 'a monumental work' of 245 clauses introduced in 1927.[2] Other enactments had whittled away the functions of the boards of guardians or added responsibilities to the county and county borough councils, long designated the boards' successors, or both.

1 F W S Craig British General Election Manifestos 1918-66 (London, 1970), pp. 29-34

2 Hansard, 5th series, 1927, ccvii. 1147

The Widows', Orphans' and Old Age Contributory Pensions Bill, 1925 had removed these categories from the Poor Law. Bills concerned with the registration of midwives and maternity and nursing homes, amongst others, increased the duties of the councils. Even those pieces of legislation that responded to pressures that had not been anticipated can now be seen to have played a part in the paving of the way to the 1928 bill. The actions of the boards of guardians at Poplar, West Ham, and Bedwelty made more vulnerable to criticism those who defended the established Poor Law system against reform of any kind. The additional derating of agriculture in 1923 increased central subventions in substitution of locally raised revenues and made the extension of the block grant principle less intimidating to local authorities than might otherwise have been the case.

Such an interpretation would appear indefensibly whiggish were it not for the programmatic approach adopted by Chamberlain and his civil servants. He it was who wanted to plan his department's legislation as an ordered progression and who asked his officals to present him with a timetable that incorporated in it the bills they themselves wished to see Parliament pass. We must assume, in the absence of records covering the queston, that at least the greater part of the paper outlining the department's proposed legislative programme, which Chamberlain submitted to the Cabinet for its

approval in November 1924, was composed by his civil servants in accordance with the government's election manifesto. Chamberlain had been one of the manifesto's principal authors, but had he not gone to the Ministry of Health in 1924, it is improbable that another Minister would have found before him a list of legislation that was very different from the one actually drawn up.

It is as improbable that someone other than Chamberlain would have carried it through in the way that he did. A deep knowledge of his departmental responsibilities had given him an elegibility for the appointment that was far greater than that of any of his colleagues in Cabinet. His command of detail gave him an authority in the Ministry equalled only by the respect in which he was held in the Commons for the lucidity of his speeches introducing technical and inaccessible legislation. His significance as an urban Unionist caused him to become the spokesman of a party decreasingly agricultural in its parliamentary membership, and allowed him to pursue reforms in which that interest was either unconcerned or - as in the case of the Poor Law - initially unfriendly. His prominence in the party and in Cabinet from the earliest years of his career at Westminster also counted. It has been little appreciated hitherto. Within five years of election to Parliament, Chamberlain had come to occupy a dominating position in the Conservative's policy-making for home affairs.

As early as September 1923, the recently appointed Chancellor recorded having heard gossip predicting that he would become party leader in a few years time.[1] Three years later, a shrewd and senior observer from the backbenches, Sir Robert Sanders, noted in his diary that Chamberlain 'is being spoken of as the future leader of the party.'[2] With the elevation of Douglas Hogg to the Lord Chancellorship in 1928, Chamberlain imagined that he and Churchill must now be regarded as the leading contenders to the succession on Baldwin's retirement.[3]

Frequent use of the word 'reform' in describing the Ministry's bills (the word that Chamberlain himself often employed) may suggest that he saw his own reputation as standing or falling by the skill with which he oiled the cogs of an already existing machine and not on the re-arrangement of the mechanism itself. This is indeed the received wisdom of the Chamberlain of the 1920s, and perhaps beyond: he was, apparently, 'a pragmatist through and through,' little interested in general principles.[4]

1 NC 1/26/329: Neville to Anne Chamberlain, 19 September 1923

2 Bodleian Library, Sir Robert Sanders Diary 1910-35, entry dated Friday, 19 February (1926)

3 NC 2/22: Diary 1926-33, entry dated March 1928

4 Ramsden op cit., p. x

At variance with this view is his lack of interest in the machinery of goverment. He made no re-arrangement in the organisation of the Ministry of Health, leaving it as he had found it. On the other hand, his political writings do not readily reveal a philosophical bent of mind, though his private correspondence gives ample evidence of a reflective one. Assumptions informed his political actions but generally remained implicit. The aphorism he coined - 'aspiration is good but achievement is better' - is faithful to his intentions, but it should not mislead us into imagining that the latter was not shaped by the former.[1] He could express frustration with mundane measures. He wrote to his sisters fresh from debate on the National Health Insurance Bill, 1928:

> 'It is one of those peculiarly tedious measures which consists in an endless series of small amendments without any larger general principles and without any novel or striking features.'[2]

Chamberlain's profound belief in local government is the key to his political mentality during this decade. He found the Ministry of Health congenial to him precisely because of the extent to which the view from its windows could be made to approximate closely with that from the city chambers in

1 NC 1/26/525: jottings in Neville Chamberlain's hand, dated by his wife September 1936

2 NC 18/1/607: Neville to Hilda Chamberlain, 31 March 1928

Birmingham. 'To my mind local goverment reform means social reform,' he declared in introducing the Local Government Bill, 1928.[1] He added that he believed in local government because he thought it closer to the people it served and able more precisely to determine their needs and to meet them than Westminster. This had been his own experience. Few Conservative MPs could claim to have shared it: indeed most of the parliamentarians who had served in urban local authorities - notably Attlee, Lansbury, and Morrison - sat on the benches opposite him. The 1928 Bill addressed his father's ambition that local authorities should be "real local Parliaments, supreme in their special jurisdiction."[2] The next two chapters examine its background and drafting.

1 Hansard, 5th series, 1928, ccxxiii. 69

2 Vote and Council Debate, December 1874, cited in E P Hennock Fit and Proper Persons (London, 1972), p. 120

CHAPTER 4

LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE 1920s

1. Introduction

2. The Condition of the Local Government System

3. The Royal Commission on Local Government, 1923-1929

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims, first, to account for the condition of the local government system in the 1920s, thereby establishing the significance of the 1929 Act; and second, to examine the working of the Royal Commission on Local Government, in so doing revealing some of the attitudes of the Ministry of Health's local government division towards the local authorities and the form of government they represented.

During this decade three general issues appeared and reappeared in politicians' and civil servants' discussions of the condition of the structure of local government. They were: first, the sharpening contrast between urban and rural units of government; second, the gradual removal of functions from the smallest local authorities and their addition to the responsibilities of the councils of counties and county boroughs; and third, the absorption by the latter of the duties of the surviving ad hoc authorities.

The first of these general issues gave rise before the First World War to argument between the two representative associations principally concerned, the Association of Municipal Corporations and the County Councils Association.

It led in 1923 to the appointment of a royal commission to examine and to make recommendations for the solution of the dispute.[1]

The second general issue - the gradual removal of functions from the lower tiers of the structure of local government - was part cause and part consequence of the decline in activity of parochial councils and meetings. Successive creations in the mid-nineteenth century of Poor Law Unions, highway and burial districts, sanitary districts, and school districts - each of which might cut across the boundaries of parochial areas or authority - had diminished the responsibilities of parishes. This process was accelerated and in some respects completed by local government legislation in the 1920s. One example was the removal by the Rating and Valuation Act of 1925 of rating powers from twelve thousand parish overseers to about six hundred and fifty rating authorities composed of county and county borough councils and their districts.

Much of the Ministry of Health's local government legislation in this decade may be seen as a continuum of which the Local Government Act of 1929 was a chronological and intellectual summation.[2] Amongst other enactments, this statute transferred the functions of one of the most significant of

1 See below, section three

2 See below, chapter five

the surviving ad hoc authorities, the boards of guardians, to the councils of counties and county boroughs. This reform of Poor Law administration represented the eventual implementation of recommendations first expressed cogently by the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress in 1909. The Ministry of Health's consideration of Poor Law reform is examined in the second half of the following section.

The continuum is nevertheless not unilinear but braided or interwoven. The reform of the Poor Law was considered in the 1920s in conjunction with proposals to alter the organisation and functions of local authorities at a time when there was strong pressure for a thorough overhaul of the financing of local government. Neither one of these three general issues was constantly paramount: each was of a different significance to the politicians and civil servants involved, and the order of priorities altered with the passage of time. In the discussion that follows, an attempt has been made to distinguish these elements: it should be remembered that in fact they were interlocked. This point - that each element was inter-related and, consequently, that to remove a piece of the jigsaw would destroy its unity - was precisely the one made by officials of the Ministry of Health in the early 1920s; and it explains Chamberlain's rigorous defence of his scheme for the reform of local government.[2]

1 See below, section two

2 See below, chapter five, section three

2. THE CONDITION OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM

The system of local government in England and Wales before the reorganisation of 1974, and certainly between the two world wars, is not immediately accessible to the non-specialist. Even the Webbs, engaged on what was to become a nine volume study of local government in England, confessed despairingly in 1920 that:

> 'Like the capitalist organisation of industry, its complications and varieties are so chaotic and senseless as to defy analysis and almost to baffle description.'[1]

What irked the Webbs most of all was the almost complete absence of a logical relationship between local authorities' areas and their functions.

> 'Up and down England there are everywhere duplicate Local Governing Bodies - in some cases as many as five or six different authorities within the same area - dealing, at the expense of one and the same fund of rates and taxes, but on antagonistic principles, with the children, with the sick, with the mentally defective, with the aged and with the able-bodied unemployed.'[2]

1 Sidney and Beatrice Webb A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth (with an introduction by Samuel H Beer, London, 1975), p. 208

2 ibid., p. 210

Overlapping and confusion, they believed, led to financial waste and administrative inefficiency; and it was against these evils, amongst others, that they had directed the Minority Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, which Mrs Webb and her colleagues had signed in 1909. The Webbs' comment in 1920 only partly reflected their frustration with the government for its failure to implement the report's recommendations. Chiefly their conclusion is a justifiable response to the complex system they had examined so carefully. As the permanent secretary at the Ministry of Health (who was not an admirer of the Webbs) explained in 1928 with his characteristic lucidity:

> 'The existing system of local government in this country is made up of two elements between which a measure of incongruity has arisen; (i) a structure framed primarily by rules of sentiment; and (ii) functions assigned to Local Authorities according to the answer given by Parliament year after year to the practical question, "Here is a function of local government which the public interest requires some Local Authorities to exercise; which of the existing Local Authorities are to discharge it?"'[1]

1 Royal Commission on Local Government, 1923-29, Minutes of Evidence, part ix, Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Health, 1928, M. 49

As this comment indicates, there was little correspondence between the areas and functions of the local government system, and this was clear even to an observer not inclined to set them against the demanding standards of Webbian administrative functionalism. The multiplicity of units making up the system was its most striking feature. The Royal Commission on Local Government, sitting for almost seven years between 1923 and 1929, identified over twenty-five thousand authorities distributed between thirty-nine different classes. They ranged from the sixty-three county councils to the twelve thousand eight hundred and fifty parish councils and meetings; and from the one hundred and forty-two burial boards to the forty-five boards of conservators under the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Acts.[1]

Even within these classes there was variety sufficient to vitiate rigid categorisation. Amongst the county boroughs, there was one with a population of between twenty and thirty thousand, yet five (Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield) with populations over four hundred thousand. Two county boroughs had rateable values of between £100,000 and £200,000 whilst four exceeded £2.5 million. The county

1 Royal Commission on Local Government, 1923-29, Minutes of Evidence, part i, Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Health, 1923, appendix 1

class was not more uniform than that of the county boroughs. Miniscule counties were on terms of functional equality with those far larger in size and in population; the Soke of Peterborough with Lancashire, for example, and the Isle of Ely with Durham. Finally there were clear signs of decay at the base of the pyramid. Of almost thirteen thousand parishes, just over half had active councils and meetings during 1920-21.

The complexity of the local government edifice is evidence both of its ability to accommodate social change without adapting to it, and also of Parliament's deliberate nurturing of the distinctive individual characteristics of localities. In the 1920s the catalyst of discussion within central government about the areas of the local government was the rapid increase in the number of county boroughs. This unit was a recent innovation. The Local Government Act of 1888, which had provisionally reshaped the pattern of local authorities, had created a new category of urban self-government, the county borough council. The Local Government Board, which had been responsible for the 1888 Act, had at first determined that towns and cities with a population in excess of 150,000 should be permitted to detach themselves from their surrounding counties for the purpose of their own administration and to call themselves county boroughs. Strong pressure exerted by MPs representing

borough constituencies, co-ordinated by the Association of Municipal Corporations, reduced this qualification during the bill's passage through Parliament to one third of the level proposed by the Board.

In consequence not ten but sixty-one county boroughs were brought into being by the 1888 Act. By 1921 a further twenty-one, together with two mergers, had been added to the total. The effect on the counties from which these county boroughs had been removed was markedly deleterious. At the latter date, counties in England and Wales lost 100,000 acres, 1.3 million in population and - most significant - £6.5 million in rateable value. The economic consequences, which we will examine separately, were dramatic.[1] County councils found themselves confronted by a yawning and ever widening gap between rate revenues diminished by the removal of urban areas of high rateable values, and expenditures increased by central government's imposition of fresh duties and responsibilities.

The counties counter-attacked. Spear-headed by the County Councils Association, formed as early as 1889, they fomented parliamentary opposition to the legislation necessary for the creation and extension of county boroughs. They had some

1 See below, chapter five, section two

success. There were fifty-four instances in which the counties achieved amendment or rejection of proposals brought forward by the supporters of county boroughs. Moreover the number of country boroughs remained all but constant during the interwar period. Eighty-two in 1921, there were eighty-three in 1940.

But the tide of county borough creations and extensions was stemmed only at the price of considerable controversy on the local legislation committee in the House of Commons. Believing that neither the Local Government Board nor its successor, the Ministry of Health, was an impartial adjudicator of its members' case, the County Councils Association pressed the government after 1920 for a committee of enquiry of high status with which to examine the dispute between the counties and the county boroughs and to make recommendations that would settle it. The Royal Commission on Local Government, chaired by the Earl of Onslow, was appointed early in 1923 in response to these reiterated demands from the County Councils Association.[1]

The debate over local authority areas had been stimulated by social changes that neither the County Councils Association

1 See below, section three

nor the Association of Municipal Corporations could influence. Both bodies could attempt to influence - and did so - the political response to that change but, as the reports of the Royal Commission on Local Government were to show, its inexorable nature and the government's determination to obtain the Associations' agreement made a series of compromises the probable result of the enquiry. Discussion of the range of functions of local authorities, no less a product of the passage of time, was yet of a more completely political character. At the heart of it was the future administration of the Poor Law; and, although contingent factors such as the notorious activities of the boards of guardians at Poplar, West Ham, and Bedwelty pressed on the discussants, the issue antedated these events and had, indeed, been largely resolved - but only on paper - in 1909.

Poor Law Reform

Before 1930, the Poor Law was administered in England and Wales by over six hundred boards of guardians. Though their areas of jurisdiction were essentially coterminous with parishes, the Poor Law Unions were in fact separate units of the local government system with their own revenues dispersed by directly elected officers, the guardians. This system of administration had been established in 1834. Seventy years

later, having evolved in ways that in many respects departed sharply from its original principles yet that did not wholly satisfy the criticisms of a new generation of politicians and administrators, the Poor Law underwent its first major examination.

Appointed little more that a week before the resignation of the Balfour Cabinet on 4 December 1905, the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress was the first detailed investigation into the operation of the national system of relief. In 1909 it presented two reports. One was signed by the chairman, Lord George Hamilton, and fourteen commissioners. The other was the work of Beatrice Webb, aided principally by her husband (who was not a member of the commission); and it received the support of three of her colleagues.

The existence of two distinct groups of signatories obscured the broad consensus generated by their investigations. Both reports had identified a pressing need for reform. Neither wished to retain the elective boards of guardians. Both wanted to replace them with committees derived from existing units of local government. The reports differed most sharply on the administrative functions they proposed to allot to these committees. The dissimilarity of their recommendations revealed fundamental differences in the approach of their

respective advocates which work together on the commission had not diminshed.

In essence the majority's report was directed not at adjusting the Poor Law but its local administration. It wanted to see multi-functional public assistance committees created in place of the boards of guardians. A single department would continue to have responsibility for policy. This proposal had a precedent. It closely resembled the arrangement implemented by the 1902 Education Act by which popularly elected school boards had been replaced by county and county borough councils' education committees under the general guidance of a new Board of Education.

By contrast, the target of the minority report's signatories had become the Poor Law itself. "We will break up, once for all, that nasty old Poor Law," wrote Beatrice Webb to Beveridge at the end of 1908, describing work on her report's last chapters.[1] This had not been her view at the outset. A year later, she had surveyed the gradual evolution of her thinking in a letter to her husband:

1 The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb ed. Norman MacKenzie (London, 1978), ii. 319

> 'How our ideas have grown - first the transfer of Poor Law Medical Relief to the P H authorities, then the break up of the Poor Law, now nothing short of clearing up the base of society....'[1]

She was consistent only in seeking to pose a radical alternative to the plans of those whom she believed were determined to return to the principles of 1834.

The minority report's recommendations were so drafted as to fragment the Poor Law and distribute its elements amongst subject specific local authority committees. The destitute would be treated not by their symptoms and therefore as an undifferentiated mass but by the cause of their destitution: the sick would become the responsibility of the public health committees, pauper children that of the education committee, and so on. These committes would be guided by policies emanating not from one government department as hitherto but from separate ministries, new ones being created as necessary. This part of the report expressed the Webbs' administrative functionalism.

Neither the majority nor the minority reports had an immediate impact on the Liberal government to which they were presented. John Burns, the President of the Local Government

1 ibid., p. 275

Board, convinced Lloyd George that circulars from his department would meet the criticisms common to both reports; and Lloyd George, preoccupied with the health insurance scheme that was to be put into effect by the 1911 Act, was ready to believe him. For their part, the Webbs were wholly opposed to insurance and unwilling to dilute their recommendations. In the last months of their work on the report (Beatrice having detached herself from the rest of her colleagues), they had become obsessed with its superiority to that of the majority. Sidney wrote contentedly of "The Final Solution of the Unemployed Problem," and both Webbs were determined to engineer the acceptance of their views by the Cabinet.[1] They indulged in tactics that Beatrice herself described as "our direct, or, as some would say, unscrupulous activity."[2] Though calculated to influence people, it won not friends but enemies for their cause.

The government's failure to implement either of the commission's reports had significant consequences. The debate over the future of the Poor Law continued but it came to be inextricably intermingled with two other issues of political controversy: the creation of a ministry of health, and the dispute between the county and county boroughs.

1 ibid., p. 315

2 loc. cit.

Moreover after 1918 the debate took place within the context of postwar retrenchment, and this raised fundamental questions about the financial relations existing between central government and the local authorities. Delay in reforming the Poor Law, itself a major administrative operation, and the particular circumstances of the time thus obliged politicans to confront it in conjunction with an issue that was even less immediately soluble, the future organisation of central-local relations.

Further exploration of Poor Law reform by central government had to wait until the creation of a Ministry of Reconstruction in September 1917. Once again the effort was in the short term substantively unsuccessful. Beatrice Webb, a member of a sub-committee on local government in the Ministry's previous incarnation as the Reconstruction Committee, continued assiduously to promote her 1909 report. By the autumn she thought that her colleagues on the Local Government Committee, as it had become, were accepting it "piece by piece, with very little amendment."[1] At the end of the year, she jubilantly recorded a "masterpiece;" the committee's unanimous support for all her original proposals.[2] Her colleagues' agreement was an achievement

1 Beatrice Webb's Diaries 1912-1924 ed. Margaret I Cole (London, 1952), p. 97

2 ibid., p. 99

in itself since the committee included two of her old adversaries on the 1905-09 royal commission, Lord George Hamilton and Sir Samuel Provis, together with others like A V Symonds of the Local Government Board in whom she often detected profound hostility to her way of thinking; but then, as she herself readily conceded: "I have learnt committee mannners."[1]

The report of the Maclean Committee (the Ministry of Reconstruction's Local Government Committee is usually described by the name of its chairman, Sir Donald Maclean MP) was published in January 1918. Its contents did not fully justify Beatrice Webb's elated optimism. Moreover in a carefully written prefatory note, the Minister (Dr Addison) explained his decision to issue the report as being 'to enable the public to form a considered judgement.'[2] He did not commit the government to legislative action or to any of its preliminary steps. Dr Addison noted accurately that the report:

> 'Represents a reasoned attempt to secure reforms in harmony with those indicated by the Royal Commission which reported on the subject in 1909 without

1 loc. cit.

2 Report on the Transfer of Functions of Poor Law Authorities in England and Wales (Cd. 8917): Parl Papers 1917-18, xviii. 529

> reviving the controversies which then centred round the Majority and Minority Reports of that body.'[1]

Whilst the Maclean Report recommended the abolition of the boards of guardians and the transfer of their functions to county and county borough councils, it was silent on the changes in the structure of central government urged by the minority report of 1909. It anticipated that councils could provide for the sick and the infirm on the rates with or without Exchequer grants under the existing Public Health Acts suitably extended where necessary. A similar arrangement was envisaged for the mentally deficient and the lunatic. The report's Home Assistance Committees, though concerned solely with outdoor relief, in other respects corresponded closely to the 1909 majority's Public Assistance Committees. Furthermore it believed that most ex-Poor Law officers would necessarily have to be incorporated into existing council staffs and that there would thus be no abrupt discontinuity with the previous and allegedly discredited system of administration.

It was left to a memorandum written by Sir Robert Morant, one of the Maclean Committee's members, to express the assumption that 'before transference takes place' a central authority

1 loc. cit.

would be created under one Minister:

> 'I.e. a Ministry for Health for England and Wales, with properly organised Sub-Departments, and having the regular assistance of carefully constituted Advisory Councils, the various local authorities which the Ministry is to supervise.'[1]

Morant's memorandum reflected wider feeling that the timing of the abolition of the Poor Law or of the distribution of its functions must now be bound up with the creation of a ministry of health.

The government, having committed itself to set up the department, accepted the Maclean Committee's recommendations that all Poor Law services relating to the treatment of the sick and infirm should become part of the general health services of the country. Dr Addison announced in November 1918, and reiterated the point the following February, that the Cabinet supported 'the principle that the remaining functions of the Poor Law authorities should ..... be transferred to other bodies,' but added that it was 'not in a position to formulate precise proposals at the present time.'[2] His civil servants in the Ministry of Health

1 Memorandum by Sir Robert Morant: Parl Papers 1917-18, xviii. 549

2 Hansard, 5th series, 1918, cx. 2340; ibid., cxii. 1838

meanwhile set to work to devise a scheme for the reform of the Poor Law.

The thinking of the department's officials on the subject in the early 1920s was expressed in an extended form in a memorandum submitted to the Cabinet by Sir Alfred Mond shortly after his appointment as Minister of Health.[1] This document summarised the work of a committee composed of senior officials. It followed general principles laid down by Dr Addison, Mond's immediate predecessor, derived essentially but not exclusively from the Maclean Committee's report. Towards the end of 1920, the committee began to examine the means and the consequences of implementation. Sixteen heads of discussion were proposed, the first and principal of which was:

> "What are the elements of a complete scheme of publicly administered health services (both environmental and personal) distinguishing (i) existing services and (ii) new services."[2]

The memorandum was divided into three parts, and their headings indicate the comprehensiveness of the document's scope. This document was of the utmost significance, for it

1 PRO, HLG 68/25: Memorandum on Reform of 1. The Poor Law; 11. The Organisation and Functions of Local Authorities; 111. Grants in Aid of the Expenditure of the Local Authorities, May 1921

2 PRO, MH 57/137: Committee on Health Organisation and Poor Law Reform, paper no. CHO 2, 19 October 1920

survived unscathed the passage of five Ministers of Health to form the foundations of Chamberlain's reform proposals. Reform of the Poor Law was henceforward firmly allied to a restructuring of the local government system and the financial relations existing between central and government and the local authorities.

One of the elements to receive the most detailed treatment was the financial implications of the proposed scheme of reform. After the war, and even before retrenchment began, the financing of the Poor Law and of local government came to occupy a position of greater importance than had been the case either in 1909 or in 1918. In a paper written in August 1920 and considered later in the year by the health organisation and Poor Law reform committee, E J Strohmenger, the Ministry's accountant-general, envisaged 'a total sum,' which he described as a 'block grant,' for public health for England and Wales to be 'apportioned amongst the new Health Authorities,' which were to be urban district councils with populations exceeding 50,000 and county and county borough councils.[1] It was to be voted by Parliament and would take the place of existing central subventions in support of local health expenditure. These were those made under the assigned revenues system, which had been set up in 1888; grants for specific services; and grants under the Agricultural Rates

1 PRO, MH 57/140: Paper by E J Strohmenger, 12 August 1920

Act of 1896, which compensated local authorities for loss of revenue resulting from the derating of agricultural land, and under the much less productive Tithe Rentcharge (Rates) Act.[1]

The method of apportioning the block grant between the health authorities was seminal and enduring. Fixed amounts per capita would be provided for those in particular categories: Strohmenger cited pauper lunatics and populations in rural districts. The balance from the block grant after the payment of these amounts would be divided amongst the health authorities according to a formula designed to increase the incomes of poorer areas by doubling the grant per capita and subtracting the sum produced by a 4d rate. Officials on the committee were clear that the inequalities of the provision thrown up by local variations, however desirable these latter might otherwise be, ran counter to the requirements of national commitments such as compulsory health insurance contributions and 'a constantly shifting population.'

> 'A system of public health services, under the general control of the Ministry of Health must have a large measure of uniformity in the several areas.'[2]

1 The evolution of grants-in-aid is examined below, chapter five, section two

2 PRO, MH 57/137: Committee on Health Organisation and Poor Law Reform, paper no. CHO 7, 28 October 1920

The block grant formula expressed in Strohmenger's paper was designed to meet this end.

A rapid succession of Ministers of Health in the first four years of the 1920s prevented detailed submission on Poor Law reform being made to the Cabinet.[1] The sixth incumbent, Wheatley, the first Labour Minister of Health, presented a memorandum on Poor Law reform to the Cabinet in March 1924, but only because the government had pledged itself to action during the course of the Poplar debate. He noted that 'innumerable inquiries' had ensured that 'the broad facts of the situation are well known' and accordingly ruled out a further royal commission or departmental inquiry on the subject. Party political consensus was desirable given the government's minority in the Commons, and Wheatley suggested:

> 'A conference between representatives of the three Parties in the House, with a view to arriving, if possible, at an agreed scheme of Reform.'[2]

He recognised that agreement was more likely if the government could provide a basis for discussion; and he offered the Maclean scheme for the transfer of Poor Law functions to London County Council as a first step. Wheatley made a single but significant adaptation designed to ensure

1 The Ministers of Health are listed in appendix one

2 PRO, HLG 68/25: Poor Law Reform - Memorandum by the Minister of Health, CP 173 (24), 11 March 1924

that the county councils' representatives on the proposed statutory committees would outnumber those from the borough councils, of which the disruptive Poplar was one. This underlined the Parliamentary origins of the minority government's action.

Wheatley's memorandum was approved. In August he returned to Cabinet to reveal that his efforts to set up the conference between the three political parties' representatives had been fruitless. His statement asserted that 'it accordingly devolves upon the Government to produce its own scheme without assistance from either of the other parties.'[1] Wheatley now favoured reform of the Poor Law throughout England and Wales, and he asked for a Cabinet committee to consider a departmental paper expressing this option. This was agreed; but the committee met twice only, making no headway, before the government resigned on 8 October.

The department's proposals, and more particularly its 1921 memorandum on the reform of the Poor Law, survived the change of government. This paper would have been amongst others awaiting the incoming Minister, Neville Chamberlain; and within days of first entering the department, the Cabinet

1 PRO, HLG 68/25: Poor Law Reform - Memorandum by the Minister of Health, CP 429 (24), 1 August 1924

memorandum outlining his legislative timetable had been drawn up.In it a bill to reform the Poor Law was postulated for 1926. In the event, the department's printed memorandum, lightly revised in that year, formed the core of its Minister's submissions for the Local Government Bill of 1928, which received the royal assent in the following year. The drafting of this major piece of legislation is examined in the next chapter.

The next section of this chapter examines the Royal Commission on Local Government. It forms both a case study in the use of such an enquiry by a government department and also an analysis of the thinking of those of the Ministry of Health's officials involved in its work.

3. THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT, 1923-1929

This commission stands out from others during its period by virtue of the length of time it lasted and the immediacy and completeness of the government's implementation of its proposals. Sitting for nearly seven years (longer than any other royal commission appointed between 1919 and 1939), from February 1923 until November 1929, it produced three reports, all of them unanimous.[1] The recommendations made in the first two of these were enshrined in bills that passed through Parliament little amended.[2] The commission was less a committee of enquiry than a temporary legislative body. The commission was remarkable also for the close relations it maintained with the government department that drafted its terms of reference. Few royal commissions are wholly independent of their initiating ministries, yet seldom are they so intimately associated with them as to become, as this commission became, part of the machinery of government. The composition of its membership suggests a distinctive approach to the resolution of the questions with which it was faced.

1 Cmd. 2506 (1927), Cmd. 3213 (1928), and Cmd. 3436 (1929)

2 Local Government (County Boroughs and Adjustments) Act, 1926; Local Government Act, 1929

Cartwright has stressed the point that it was in the twentieth century that departmental committees and royal commissions became 'a major institution of government.'[1] He identified three types. First: the impartial, composed of intelligent laymen; second: the expert, with a membership made up of representatives of the interests involved; and third: the representative, whose members are so selected as to balance mutually antagonistic interest groups. The Royal Commission on Local Government of 1923-29 falls into the last category.

It has been said that during the interwar years fewer committees of enquiry were expert or impartial and more were carefully contrived balances of the interested parties. Writing in 1934, Gosnell argued that of the three types of commission, the one that had a membership that was representative of the main interests involved had been the type most commonly appointed in the previous fifteen years.[2] Some contemporaries explained this development as a necessary corollary of a newly representative democracy that members of these inquiries should be so chosen as to reflect differing opinions in the electorate at large.[3]

1 T J Cartwright Royal Commissions and Departmental Committees in Britain (London, 1975), p. 207

2 Harold F Gosnell 'British Royal Commissions of Inquiry' Political Science Quarterly xlix (1934)

3 Sir Arthur Salter's prefatory remarks in R V Vernon and N Mansergh (eds.) Advisory Bodies (London, 1939)

In fact the proliferation of pressure groups designed to articulate opinions in ways that were politically influential made it difficult for governments not to use them as the means of consultation.

Middlemas offers a similar interpretation in a different context. He has emphasised politicians' preference at this time for negotiation between interest groups as a way of resolving intractable disputes. He uses the term 'corporate bias' to describe the collaboration of representatives of organised labour, the political parties and industrial managers in the forming of government responses. Parliamentary opinion plays a subsidiary role in this process.[1]

The peacable resolution of political differences is a constant if not always obvious feature of much parliamentary activity. But negotiation between interest groups - the desire for consensual agreement - has an effect on the government's perception of problems of policy. The success of negotiation as a tactic to avoid crises encouraged many politicians to define those political questions to which they might reasonably be expected to find answers as being those that were susceptible to solution in this way. By the same

1 Keith Middlemas Politics in Industrial Society (London, 1979), p. 20

token, those that were not could be perceived as being beyond the scope of proper parliamentary activity.

Yet these generalisations inevitably suggest a consistency where none in fact existed. The memberships of committees of enquiry were composed according to criteria thought appropriate to the particular issue they were required to address. Some were impartial, some expert, and some representative. Sir Herbert Samuel's Coal Commission, appointed in 1925, had members selected precisely because of their ignorance of the industry in the belief that this guaranteed an impartial investigation. On the other hand, Viscount Ullswater's Royal Commission on London Government, which met for the first time at the end of 1921, was essentially an expert body with a minority of impartial commissioners. Middlemas' and others' generalisations aid analysis: they are not accurate descriptions of every instance they discuss or comprehend.

The appointment of the Royal Commission on Local Government represents the view that the first duty of government was to avert breakdowns in the political process and not to address fundamental problems, for on neither the problems of local government nor their solution was agreement readily available. The commission was intended to resolve conflict between the local authority interest groups, making

recommendations for the improvement or the development of the local government system only in so far as they eased the gaining of agreement amongst the parties involved. The 'problem' of local government which the enquiry was asked to examine was the discord between the local authorities' representative associations and not the objective conditions of local government itself. Accordingly no effort was spared to obtain unanimity amongst the commissioners when it came to the drafting of their reports.

Appointment

The commission's appointment was a direct result of lobbying by the County Councils Association. It had written to the Minister of Health at the end of 1921 asking for a committee of enquiry of this kind to resolve the dispute over county borough creations and extensions between itself and the Association of Municipal Corporations. The Minister, Sir Alfred Mond, responded by inviting the two parties to his department. This had been the course recommended by I G Gibbon, the senior official of the local government division. In a note to the Minister he observed:

> 'It is absurd that the various bodies concerned in local government should keep at arm's length. It is much better that they should all put their

> heads together to see whether they cannot come to some agreement.'[1]

Talks presided over by the Ministry's parliamentary secretary, the Earl of Onslow, were 'quite useless,' and he believed the two sides 'would never be in agreement' on their own.[2] Mond prevaricated, toying with the idea of submitting the dispute to a joint committee of both Houses chaired by a well-tried arbiter, perhaps Lord Cave. He played for time by claiming that a royal commission was 'impracticable' whilst there was one sitting on the local government of London.[3] Finally Onslow himself suggested that the government should accede to the County Councils Association's plan and that Mond should indeed appoint a commission. It should consist, he thought:

> 'Of the representatives of the County Councils, County Boroughs, Municipal Boroughs, and Rural and Urban District Councils, and (it should) thrash the whole thing out.'[4]

1 PRO, HLG 8/99: Memorandum signed by I G Gibbon, 5 December 1921

2 The Earl of Onslow Sixty-Three Years (London, 1944), p. 178

3 PRO, HLG 8/99: Mond to Hope, 18 November 1921 (The Royal Commission on London Government, chaired by Viscount Ullswater, was appointed in October 1921 and reported in February 1923)

4 The Earl of Onslow op. cit., p. 178

By enhancing the status of the fruitless discussions he had chaired, Onslow envisaged bringing the dispute to a solution satisfactory to all concerned. Mond accepted the advice. As he announced to the House of Commons:

> 'I do not propose to proceed on the lines of conferences, but by the method of a Royal Commission to which I understand both sides are now agreeable.'[1]

The local authorities' associations were consulted at every stage of the commission's appointment. They received a letter from the Ministry's Second Secretary in which they were asked to 'concur in the suggested terms of reference' and to offer names from amongst their members for the commissionerships.[2] The associations made no objection to the terms of reference, which were purposely very broadly based; nor did the Ministry select commissioners to represent the authorities who had not been recommended by them. The Municipal Journal took some satisfaction in reporting that the Ministry had sought local authorities' views before setting up the commission.

1 Hansard 5th series, 1921, clv. 306

2 PRO, HLG 8/1: Symonds to the Secretaries of the County Councils Association, the Association of Municipal Corporations, and the Urban and the Rural District Councils Associations, December 1922

Three commissioners represented the opinions of the Association of Municipal Corporations: H G Pritchard, Sir Lewis Beard, and Sir William Middlebrook MP. Pritchard was to speak for the non-county borough councils and the other two were to put the county borough councils' case. The County Councils Association's spokesmen were Lord Strachie, Sir Ryland Adkins MP, and E R Turton MP. Sir Walter Nicholas appeared for the Urban District Councils Association and Colonel J L V S Williams for the Rural District Councils Association.

Seven of these eight expert commissioners had qualified as solicitors or as barristers, and by being lawyers were thus representative of many senior administrators in local government. Pritchard was a parliamentary agent with great experience of local legislation, and was secretary of the Association of Municipal Corporations. Beard was the town clerk of Coventry. Middlebrook, the Liberal MP for South Leeds from 1909 to 1922 and a past Lord Mayor of the city, had been the chairman of the local legislation committee of the House of Commons at the height of the controversy over extensions and creations of county boroughs. Strachie was the President of the County Councils Association, and Adkins and Turton the chairman and a member respectively of its executive committee. Both Nicholas and Williams were the chairmen of their associations' executive committees.

The Minister of Health added five impartial commissioners to these eight experts: the Earl of Onslow, who became the commission's chairman, E H Lloyd KC, the Hon Arthur Myers, General Sir George Macdonogh, and W R Buchanan-Riddell. Lloyd, a prominent silk specialising in the procedures for country boroughs' extensions and creations, was the only one of the five possessing a detailed knowledge of the issues before the commission. The others were men chosen deliberately for their ignorance of the subject; and Onslow played the chief part in their selection.

Myers had been a minister in the New Zealand government. Macdonogh's appointment suggests a quid pro quo for he had found Onslow a post in military intelligence in France during the war. The bursar of The Queen's College, of which the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Health, Sir Arthur Robinson, had been an undergraduate member, was canvassed for the name of an Oxford don for it was thought desirable to include one amongst the commissioners. The bursar briefly pondered the worth of Dr Phelps, the Provost of Oriel College and a member of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, before concluding damningly that 'we none of us here quite trust him.'[1] This may have been because Dr Phelps is said to have 'liked to describe himself, with a

1 PRO, HLG 8/1: The Rev. W B Cronshaw to Sir Arthur Robinson, December 1922

little exaggeration, as the titular head of the Labour Party in Oxford.'[1] Buchanan-Riddell, the Principal of Hertford College, who had the irresistible recommendation that he had been Onslow's brother-in-law's best man, was chosen instead.

Onslow himself occupied an anomolous position as the commission's chairman. As a peer with no formal connections with local government, he was ostensibly no less neutral than the other four impartial members; yet he was also a junior member of the government with close ties to the Ministry of Health. He had joined the department in 1921 as its parliamentary secretary, remaining there until May 1923 when he went to the Board of Education where his brother-in-law Edward Wood was the President. He became an under-secretary of state at the War Office in 1924; and Paymaster-General towards the end of Baldwin's second administration, taking responsibility for the 1928 Local Government Bill in the House of Lords. He received a salary in this post - it was usually unpaid - and was provided with a room and a private secretary in the Ministry of Health. He remembered that he 'was, in fact, a sort of extra Minister attached to the Ministry of Health.'[2] He retained links with the department's political heads even after his departure in 1923.

1 A J P Taylor A Personal History (London, 1983), p. 68

2 The Earl of Onslow op. cit., p. 179

'I cannot help regarding you as still one of us,' Chamberlain had written to him in 1925.[1] It was indeed this sense of identity that had recommended Onslow as the commission's chairman in the first place. Mond's successor, Griffith-Boscawen, made the assumption explicit in a letter to the Prime Minister.

> 'I have suggested Onslow as chairman as he had a great deal to do with the former investigations and it seems to me desirable to establish a connexion between the Department and the Commission.'[2]

Procedure

Immediately after the commisson's first meeting, Onslow warned Chamberlain, the Minister of Health, that the Labour Party seemed likely to press for representation on its membership.[3] Four of the eight expert commissioners were - or had been - MPs: three Liberals (Adkins, Middlebrook, and - as Sir Edward Strachey - Lord Strachie) and a Unionist (Turton, who had been a Gladstonian Liberal candidate in the

1 Surrey County Record Office, Guildford, 4th Earl of Onslow Papers, 173/77/139: Neville Chamberlain to Lord Onslow, 18 February 1925

2 PRO, HLG 8/1: Griffith-Boscawen to Bonar Law, 31 January 1923

3 PRO, HLG 8/90: Onslow to the Minister of Health, 27 February 1923

1895 general election). A Labour Party commissioner seemed not unreasonable, had there been one suitable to take the place of a representative from the local authorities' associations. There was a precedent. Stephen Walsh, the Labour MP for the Ince division of South-West Lancashire, had been a member of the Royal Commission on London Government chaired by Lord Ullswater.

But Onslow was strongly opposed to the idea. He advanced two arguments. First: in the general sense that political representation qua political representation was highly undesirable; and second: as a particular criticism of the Labour Party. He remarked:

> 'None of the members of the Commission regard themselves as politicians in any way, and they are all most anxious that this element of discord should not be imported.'[1]

He added his own view:

> 'Personally I very much hope that we shall not be forced to introduce politics into our deliberations.
> .... The only chance of getting an agreement on this very important subject is, I think, to banish every other consideration except the immediate issue between town and country.'[2]

1 loc. cit.

2 loc. cit.

He believed that Labour's nominees could not do otherwise than regard the commission as 'an engine for political agitation.'[1]

Having excluded, as he hoped, party political influences from the commission's work, Onslow sought an agreed interpretation of the terms of reference. They were to be so limited as to drain discussion of the little party political argument that might otherwise have developed. In 1924 Onslow reminded two of his colleagues of the agreement they had reached.

> 'I take it that we are accepting the principle that the Act of 1888 would continue to form the basis of local government in England and that the modifications we may suggest in that Act are designed to adapt these principles to modern conditions and not to effect radical alterations in the system of local government.'[2]

An investigation might be mounted in the future to consider whether 'radical alterations' were desirable, but the present commission could not be the vehicle for that exercise. A holding operation was essential in the meantime:

> 'Unless a settlement between the <u>two parties</u> (his emphasis) is reached soon, local government will suffer very seriously indeed in efficiency.'[3]

1 loc. cit.

2 PRO, HLG 8/3: Onslow to Adkins and Beard, 31 December 1924

3 PRO, HLG 8/3: Onslow to Robinson, 1 June 1924

Accordingly the commissioners set out to make changes that would restore and not reform the system of local government. Their recommendations were to be political only in their acceptance of the status quo.

We have seen that Onslow's appointment had been made 'to establish a connexion between the Department and the Commission.'[1] He kept closely in touch with the Minister and the Ministry's officials, sometimes through his own efforts and sometimes through the agency of the commission's secretary, Michael Heseltine, the secretary to the department's consultative councils, a senior appointment approximately of assistant secretary rank, who had ready access to the department's senior officials. Shortly after Chamberlain arrived at the Ministry in March 1923, he received a timetable from Onslow setting out the commission's activities in the coming months.

> 'I am going to ask (my colleagues) to work with a view to reporting in time for the introduction of legislation in 1925, if legislation be needed; that is to say that their report should be ready by August 1924, before the summer holidays. I do not know whether it would be possible to report by then but

1 PRO, HLG 8/1: Griffith-Boscawen to Bonar Law, 31 January 1923

> I feel that unless some sort of date is fixed we shall never get any interest taken in the Commission's work.'[1]

Chamberlain approved of Onslow's suggestions, and the commission duly followed the proposed schedule.

Onslow was always careful to ensure that the commission's work did not in any way impinge on the Ministry's plans for the reform of local government. At one point he asked Heseltine to provide him with a short memorandum:

> '(a) On excactly what they (his fellow commissioners) want (b) Views of the M of H thereon. How much can I accept?'[2]

Heseltine asked for guidance from the permanent secretary so that:

> 'I should then be in a position to tell Lord Onslow personally how the proposed transfers of function bear upon any general scheme of reorganisation of health services which the Department have in view.'[3]

1 PRO, HLG 8/90: Onslow to the Minister of Health, 14 February 1923

2 PRO, HLG 8/6: Onslow to Heseltine, 23 March 1925

3 PRO, HLG 8/6: Heseltine to Robinson, 24 March 1925

Sir Arthur Robinson responded that the Ministry's Poor Law reform proposals intended to make the health authority the county council 'to the maximum extent available.'[1] This news had a significant impact on the County Councils' Association, discouraging it from resisting absolutely the county boroughs' claims to other local services.

The relationship worked the other way. By 1925 the department's officials had decided that population size was an inadequate criterion, because too hotly contested, by which to assess proposals for the extension and creation of county boroughs. The Association of Municipal Corporations' representatives suggested that efficiency of service provision might make a standard of measurement that could be made to be 'scientific.' Heseltine quickly wrote to Onslow stressing the importance of discovering how far the County Councils Association's witnesses would be prepared to follow this lead.[2] Here we can see the Ministry using the commission as a sounding board to divine opinion amongst the local authorities' representative associations.

1 PRO, HLG 8/6: Robinson to Heseltine, 27 March 1925

2 PRO, HLG 8/6: Heseltine to Onslow, nd

The Evidence of the Ministry of Health

The commission began its sittings by considering a very full statement from the Ministry of Health. I G Gibbon, who submitted it, was questioned by the commissioners paragraph by paragraph over five full days. He was asked to produce further evidence, and he subsequently provided sixteen appendices to the original memorandum. In its published version, which included Gibbon's oral evidence and his subsequent contributions, it contained sixteen chapters and forty-four appendices, and extended for two hundred and twelve pages.

It had two purposes: first, to provide an account of the contemporary system; and second, to identify the nature of local authorities' responses to modern conditions. It began with a chapter - 'The Establishment of Modern Local Government' - on the system's origins from Anglo-Saxon times the contents of which expressed a sense of inexorable development. Subsequent chapters dealt with the classes, the functions, and the expenditure of local authorities, and with their supervision by county councils and by central government.

The second part of the memorandum discussed local authorities' development under modern conditions. It noted

the growing importance of county councils: chapter nine hadthe title 'Tendency to Greater Use of County Councils for Local Government.' There was a brief and dismissive criticism of the Webbs' A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain ('simple logic is a very unsure guide of good administration'[1]) in a chapter on regional authorities. The hard-headed pragmatists on the commission were bemused by this. 'No such thing as a Regional Authority has been tried?' asked one commissioner. 'No,' replied Gibbon.[2] The remaining six chapters examined local government's committee system, the alteration of local authorities and of their areas, and local rating.

The memorandum sought to establish the Ministry's 'guiding principles' in its relations with local authorities. They are elusive. Questioned by Sir Ryland Adkins as to whether all government departments wanted to supervise local authorities, Gibbon replied: 'No, we do not want to.'[3] The Ministry wished to portray itself to the commission as the passive partner in the relationship, responding to local authorities' needs as they arose and not prescribing beyond

1 Royal Commission on Local Government, 1923-29, Minutes of Evidence, part i, Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Health, 1923, M. 175

2 ibid., Q. 1876

3 ibid., Q. 1431

general exhortation the paths along which it believed they ought to develop. The public face of its 'guiding principles' was that it followed local government's lead.

The Ministry's evidence accordingly suggested that local authorities had a purpose that elevated them from being mere administrative agents on behalf of central government. As Sir Arthur Robinson expressed it most succinctly before the commission in 1928, it was to 'promote good government.'[1] It was agreed that by the 1920s the structure of local government could be criticised for failing to meet that objective. The memorandum reminded the commissioners of the criteria against which the department believed they ought to set any recommendations they might see fit to make.

> 'The need is to devise, so far as may be necessary, an organisation which will stimulate and preserve local public spirit.'[2]

To do so, local authorities should have 'clear boundaries and definite individuality.'[3]

1 Royal Commission on Local Government, 1923-29, Minutes of Evidence, part ix, Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Health, 1928, M. 8

2 Royal Commission on Local Government, 1923-29, Minutes of Evidence, part i, Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Health, 1923, M. 62

3 ibid., M. 63

Yet practicalities soon interfered with this theoretical standpoint. Whilst authorities should be encouraged to maintain their independence as against one another, it was admitted that they ought to combine to provide a joint service where there was clear evidence that by combination alone would standards be improved and costs reduced.[1] On the one hand, the department asserted, it was essential that a local authority provide as wide a range of services to the community on its own responsibility: on the other hand, it recognised that increasingly demanding national standards and financial insufficiency compelled authorities to pool their resources. Nevertheless the Ministry maintained fundamental principles that it conceded elsewhere were unsuited to the majority of councils.

> 'The basic condition of sound democratic local government is active and intelligent public spirit; and this is likely to develop best where the Authority has a wide range and large responsibility. It is likely to be dissipated if duties are divided between too many authorities.'[2]

What was meant by what the department called public spirit? It had something to do with simplicity.

1 ibid., M. 100-114

2 ibid., M. 178

> 'Simplicity is essential for good government, and a complication of Authorities must reduce the active interest and participation of the private citizen. Local government in the modern sense is comparatively recent, as already shown, and there is a steadily growing spirit in local government.'[1]

But this simplicity stopped short of the Webbs' administrative functionalism, as we have seen; and it is not clear that by this 'steadily growing spirit' the Ministry's memorandum meant more than to imply that, in its officials' opinion, local authorities were now more prepared to meet their growing responsibilities that hitherto. In carefully coded and diplomatic language, the department was telling the commissioners that nothing should stand in the way of county and county borough councils' gradual accretion of functions. It is nevertheless appropriate to ask what the department's evidence to the commission tells us about the Ministry's 'guiding principles' in its administration of the system of local government in England and Wales. Does it reveal the existence of a distinctive departmental point of view?

Both politicians and civil servants have admitted that ministries do indeed have a corpus of received wisdoms about

1 ibid., M. 177

the responsibilities allotted them. Ministers describe it as a coherent 'departmental policy,' and one that is usually in opposition to their own. A mere ten days after his appointment as Minister of Housing, Crossman confided his impressions to his tape-recorder in these words:

> 'There is a constant debate as to how the Minister should be advised or, shall we say, directed and pushed and cajoled into the line required by the Ministry. There is a tremendous esprit de corps in the Ministry and the whole hierarchy is determined to preserve its own policy. Each Ministry has its own departmental policy and this policy goes on while Ministers come and go.'[1]

Officials too acknowledge its existence, though naturally it appears to them in a different guise. They speak of it not as a policy but as a philosophy; not as the means of wilful opposition to ministerial directives but as the essential pre-requisite for decision-making in government. In their own eyes civil servants see themselves as practical men and politicians, where they are not clearly fools or charlatans, as incorrigible idealists.

Bridges, head of the civil service between 1946 and 1952, has used an evocative image to illustrate this point. He argues

1 R H S Crossman The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister: volume one - Minister of Housing 1964-66 (London, 1975), p. 31

that the wise official must put the departmental philosophy at the service of his minister so as 'to let the waves of the practical philosophy wash against ideas put forward by his Ministerial master.'[1] Departmental philosophies are by definition neutral and impartial, explained Bridges.

> 'They are the expression of the long continuity of experience which can be one of the strongest qualities of an institution, if well organized. Again they are broadly based, and are the resultant of protests and suggestions, and counter-suggestions, from many interests, of discussion and of debates in which many types of mind have taken part. They represent an acceptable middle point of view after the extreme divergencies have been rooted out.'[2]

This is a classic definition, elegantly expressed by a senior practitioner. How accurate a representation is it of relations between permanent officials and minister in the Ministry of Health and in the civil service as a whole?

Historians have frequently underestimated the corrosive powers of the departmental view outlined by Bridges, formulated and expressed as it is by career-minded permanent officials, on the partisan attitudes of transitory

1 Sir Edward Bridges Portrait of a Profession (Cambridge, 1951), p. 19

2 ibid., pp. 16-17

politicians, here today and gone tomorrow. Policy-making in a government department can flow over the 'barriers' of political changes often too eagerly delineated by historians: precedents are important to civil servants and also - if in a different sense - to politicians.

It would be misleading to depict the departmental view as the unanimous product of civil servants' discussion and an unevolving 'continuity of experience' that never changed its emphasis. Bridges has proposed that it is 'the resultant of protests and suggestions, and counter-suggestions, from many interests, of discussion and of debates in which many types of mind have taken part:'[1] but this dialectic is a constant feature of departmental activities, if less evident at some times than at others; and it is stimulated by changes of government and personality, both political and official. Politicians like Crossman are inclined to see only united opposition to their intentions or policies. In fact much debate is conducted by civil servants amongst themselves in competition for the ear of their political head.[2] It is a process and not, as Bridges implies, a fixed attitude of mind.

1 loc. cit.

2 An example is provided by disputes over food rationing during the First World War: see José Harris 'Bureaucrats and Businessmen in British Food Control, 1916-19' in Kathleen Burk (ed.) War and the State (London, 1982), pp. 135-156

It is thus difficult for the historian to identify its contents at any particular moment for it undergoes continuous evolution and change. Especially was this true of the Ministry of Health's local government officials whose deliberate passivity was activated only by pragmatism. This response was not unique to this department. A pamphlet on the machinery of government prepared by Political and Economic Planning in the summer of 1941 identified the weaknesses of the civil service as being due:

> "Largely to an overpowering group of inhibitions - a species of administrative Puritanism which subconsciously identifies enterprise and imagination in government as a temptation of Satan."[1]

This 'group of inhibitions' was evident in senior civil servants' utterances. Sir Horace Wilson, the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Labour and a future head of the civil service, is said to have claimed in 1926:

> "I am sure it would be fatal if anybody from the Ministry of Labour could be suspected of having a theory of wages at all. If we had one, the chief thing we should have to do would be to disguise it."[2]

1 W A Ross 'The Training of Civil Servants' Public Administration xxiii (1946), 120

2 loc. cit.

Montagu Harris, for a while the head of the Ministry of Health's intelligence branch, declared in an article in the journal Public Administration:

> "I do not propose - for it would be obviously improper for a civil servant to do so - to discuss what ought to be the sphere of the state in local administration."[1]

Civil servants' words and their actions may not necessarily be one and the same. What they believe they may properly do, and what they actually do, may be different. The representative members on the Royal Commission on Local Government attempted to expose such a distinction between theory and practice.

Gibbon alleged that 'all Government Departments (supervise local authorities) against their will.'[2] The Ministry's memorandum had listed eight kinds of central supervision, ranging from its direct control exercised through loan and grants and by audit to its functions as an appellate body and as an authority acting in default of action or of proper or effective action by local authorities. To the representatives of their associations it mattered little that the

1 loc. cit.

2 Royal Commission on Local Government, 1923-29, Minutes of Evidence, part i, Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Health, 1923, Q. 1432

Ministry was allegedly an unwilling agent of central supervision. Their concern was the fact of it and not the reluctance with which it was said to be discharged. Moreover such scant evidence as has survived of the workings of the Ministry's local government division - and it is scanty indeed - suggests that Gibbon (and probably his colleagues also) was not consistent in his attitude to local authorities. One of his junior associates has ruthlessly revealed what he believed to be the contradiction in Gibbons' thought and practice.

> 'Theoretically he was all for liberty and independence of local authorities ... In practice when he dealt with particular cases he was something of a bureaucrat, that is in cases where the Ministry had control, as in the sanctioning of loans. The local authority might wish to carry out a work by direct labour. No, they must go to contract. They might wish to install in a proposed swimming bath a certain method of filtration. No, they must install a method more favoured by the Ministry's engineering staff. Being inclined to support the local authority, I would murmur in discussion 'government with the consent of the governed,' but this interjection was impatiently brushed aside.'[1]

1 W A Ross 'Local Government Board and After: Retrospect' Public Administration xxxiv (1956), 23-24

This is typical, not unique. Those who advocate the devolution of responsibilities from central to local government have often been frustrated when they found themselves confronted by local indifference to pressing local needs. What civil servants defined as local authorities' defective practice might undermine the enthusiasm of even their staunchest supporters in central government.

Local efficiency was one criterion: the professional expertise of the civil servant was another. Developed by long exposure to a particular facet of a department's work, it made infinitely more difficult a rigid adherence to the official's traditional and essentially passive role of regulator or referee. As Ross' comment on Gibbon indicates (and as he concedes elsewhere in respect of his own career), there were occasions when a knowledgeable official was inclined to depart from the function allotted him by Montagu Harris and Sir Horace Wilson. Ross believed this to be inevitable:

> 'A keen official in the Ministry of Health is sure to form his own theories on health or local government.'[1]

Another member of the department expressed the same view more forcefully still. To her mind her colleagues were inclined

1 W A Ross 'The Training of Civil Servants' Public Administration xxiii (1946), 121

to regard themselves:

> 'Almost as missionaries deeply involved in the improvement of social conditions and emotionally bound up with the success of the schemes for which they were responsible.'[1]

These two comments plausibly see a tension between officials' public face, as described by Harris and Wilson, and their private inclinations.

It was a tension explored by some members of the Royal Commission on Local Government. They voiced doubts as to whether the opinions expressed in the Ministry's memorandum were those of the official presenting it, I G Gibbon, or of the department itself. Gibbon's view was that:

> 'This Memorandum is an endeavour as impartially as possible to put down what seems to be the guiding principles upon which the Ministry have acted in giving their decisions. It is really an endeavour to put down the Ministry's principles. There is no Bible where the principles of the Ministry are set out.'[2]

1 Enid Russell-Smith Modern Bureaucracy (London, 1974), p. 82

2 Royal Commission on Local Government, 1923-29, Minutes of Evidence, part i, Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Health, 1923, Q. 2463

The defence is not entirely convincing, Gibbon was an authority on local government in his own right, as is attested by his regular contributions to the journal Public Administration and by his long list of monographs.[1] Allegedly declining to read a file, he 'was able to concentrate on general principles (and) his methods of argument were forceful.'[2] Certainly the Ministry's memorandum was at least mainly his own work, though all we know about its preparation is the subsequent comment of a principal in the local government division that Gibbon discussed its contents 'in conference with some of us round his table.'[3] It is hardly conceivable that he could have expunged his views absolutely either from the memorandum or, indeed, from his daily work as one of the Ministry's senior officials.

The position advanced by Wilson and by Harris is evidently an ideal comparable to that of historical objectivity for the historian; and designed less for private adherence than for public practice. Though unattainable and in some respects undesirable, it nevertheless provides an essential creative tension in the work of both. What is less clear, even from a

1 Gibbon's publications, excluding his excessively numerous articles, are listed under his name in appendix three

2 W A Ross 'The Local Government Board and After: Retrospect' Public Administration xxxiv (1956), 22,24

3 ibid., 23

careful reading of his publications, is the nature and the content of Gibbon's views about local government.

It is more convenient to begin with a negative: that is, to say what Gibbon's views were not. They were not identifiably party political, at any rate in the sense of devoted adherence to a particular manifesto or programme, in so far as there were anyway clear party divisions on national policy towards the system of local government. He had political views of a kind, certainly: 'as to politics and the welfare state,' we are told pithily if insufficiently, 'he inclined in the end to be pessimistic and to see the approach of economic disaster.'[1] Such pessimism is scarcely politically distinctive, and may in any case have been merely the jaundiced reflections of old age. In a rare moment of published self-revelation, Gibbon wrote:

> 'I am an unrelenting empiricist,
> pragmaticist (sic) if you like,
> patiently watching results and ready,
> if facts so call, to change methods and
> even purposes by experience.'[2]

This comment sets him squarely amidst the majority of senior civil servants. Its attitude - 'the official creed' - has been described by H E Dale, one of its members, as being one

1 ibid., 24

2 I G Gibbon 'Some Problems of Local Government' Public Administration ix (1931), 99

of 'stoical realism.'[1] Such a phrase translates awkwardly into a meaningful attitude of mind. 'Brief generalisation (about the official creed) is likely to be unfair,' we have been warned, partly because of 'the range of human material within the service' and partly because of the diversity of response to similar events at different times.[2] Inconsistency is inevitable.

Ross claimed that civil servants were not conservative but leaned 'rather towards the Fabian point of view.'[3] Presumably he meant by this that they desired gradual improvements but only wherever and whenever opportunities for them happened to arise. Dale agreed. He believed that:

> 'The general temper of mind is Left Centre. Most of (the higher civil service) have a keen sense of the national improvements that are required and possible, and no particular tenderness for vested interests: but they have seen too much of government to believe in the indefinite extension of its functions.'[4]

1 H E Dale The Higher Civil Service of Great Britain (Oxford, 1941), p. 94

2 Frank Dunnill The Civil Service (London, 1956), p. 118

3 W A Ross commenting on 'The Education of the Civil Servant,' a paper given by H J Laski, Public Administration xxi (1943), 94

4 Dale op. cit., p. 107

In other words, he concluded, half of the higher civil service would vote Liberal, a quarter Conservative, and a quarter - and 'probably increasing in number' - Labour.[1] Gibbon was certainly not a member of the Conservative quarter.

Gibbons' views about the local government system may best be characterised as fatalist. He was a realist, stoical or otherwise. The memorandum he presented to the Royal Commission on Local Government contained a substantial historical ingredient which purported to reveal the gradual enlargement of the effective units within the system over a considerable time scale. Gibbon seems to have favoured - or, any rate, to have accepted - this development; and the department's evidence to the commission heavily underlined the inexorability of this gradual process of change. He was not alone in holding the view: indeed, it had long been asserted that councils of counties and county boroughs must play a greater part in local administration. By accepting this line of argument, Gibbon placed himself in the vanguard of those unprepared to stand with conservatives who imagined that this development could be arrested. We may conclude that his guiding principle, and that of the division for which he was responsible, was to steer a middle course between avid acceptance and encouragment of the historic and

1 loc. cit.

progressive trend that had increased and was increasing the functions of the councils of counties and country boroughs (a trend with which he nevertheless had considerable personal sympathy); and resolute support of those seeking to impede and reverse this development. Such an attitude perfectly corresponds with the proper constitutional role of the civil servant, appreciated by Sir Horace Wilson and Montague Harris and misunderstood by Political and Economic Planning.

At one level of analysis the intentions of the Ministry of Health in setting up the Royal Commission on Local Government can be seen as an extension of this role. The commission's membership had been carefully devised: it was deliberately non-party political in complexion. The local authorities' associations were represented on it to their satisfaction yet they were adroitly balanced by impartial commissioners.

The enquiry's deliberations were long drawn out and its achievements modest in content: indeed, they were considerable only in that many of its recommendations, unlike those of so many royal commissions, had immediate statutory expression. Through all this the department appeared to play a passive part, an arbitrator or a referee not - to use Sir Robert Morant's phrase - 'an immense influence for good

towards developing new notions.'[1] The deficiencies of the commission and, by implication, the Ministry of Health, haveearned harsh judgements (or, more damning still, no judgement) from historians and writers on local government.[2]

Benefiting chiefly from access to the department's working papers, another level of analysis suggests that the Ministry of Health's role was not passive but defensive. As we have seen, by 1921 the department had well-ordered views on the restructuring of local government; and much of its activity in this sphere over the eight years that followed the framing of its memorandum was devoted to a determined protection of this scheme. The commission formed a crucial element in this. It involved the local authorities' associations in what was an issue essentially subordinate to the main thrust of departmental thinking, and made the more so by the permanent secretary's deliberate exclusion of the Poor Law from the commission's terms of reference.[3] The commission

1 Sir Robert Morant 'Duties and Responsibilities of the Civil Service towards the Public' in The Civil Servant and His Profession (London, 1920)

2 W A Robson The Development of Local Government (London, 1931), pp. 36,44-45; Bryan Keith-Lucas and Peter G Richards A History of Local Government in the Twentieth Century (London, 1978), chapter 9

3 Correspondence relating to the commission's terms of reference is preserved in files with the following reference numbers: PRO, HO 45/15659 and HLG 8/1-3 (Robinson notes the intention to exclude the Poor Law from the terms of reference in an intradepartmental note - PRO, HLG 8/92: Robinson to Gibbon, 21 June 1926)

tied up the associations whilst the Ministry progressed to the restructuring of the system of local government finally obtained by the 1929 Act. The following chapter explains how this was achieved.

CHAPTER 5

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 1929

1. Introduction

2. Local Government Finance

3. Drafting the Local Government Bill, 1928: Chamberlain versus Churchill

4. Conclusion

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyses the drafting of the bill that in due course became the Local Government Act of 1929.[1] It was to prove an enactment of prodigious size. Chamberlain estimated that his speech on the second reading lasted for two and a half hours.[2] The debate filled one hundred and thirty columns of the official report.[3] It was, Chamberlain told the Commons, 'the most important Measure of the Session.'[4] What did it do and what was its significance?

1 Much of the information in this chapter has been drawn from the following secondary sources: Edwin Cannan History of Local Rates in England (London, 1927 ed.), Herman Finer English Local Government (London, 1933), C D Foster, R A Jackman, and M Perlman Local Government Finance in a Unitary State (London, 1980), E P Hennock 'Central/local government relations in England: an outline 1800-1950' Urban History Yearbook (Leicester, 1982), Ursula K Hicks British Public Finances (London, 1954), Clive Martlew 'The State and Local Government Finance' Public Administration lxi (1983), Mabel Newcomer Central and Local Finance in Germany and England (New York, 1937), Clifford Pearce The Machinery of Change in Local Government 1888-1974 (London, 1980), Gerald Rhodes 'Local Government Finance 1918-1966' (Report of the Committee of Inquiry under the Chairmanship of Frank Layfield QC into the Relationship between Central and Local Government, Evidence and Commissioned Work, Appendix vi: Cmnd. 6456, 1976), Evelyn Sharp The Ministry of Housing and Local Government (London, 1969), P J Waller Town, City, and Nation (Oxford, 1983), and C H Wilson (ed.) Essays on Local Government (London, 1948).

2 NC 2/22 Diary 1926-33, entry dated 1 December (1928)

3 Hansard, 5th series, 1928, ccxxiii. 65-194

4 ibid., 65

We may summarise its clauses by saying that it had seven purposes. It abolished the boards of guardians and transferred their responsbilities to the councils of counties and county boroughs. It detached most of what had become specialist Poor Law services and gave them to these councils' public health committees. It provided for co-ordination between local authority and voluntary hospitals. It reinforced and added to the counties' public health responsibilities. In most cases it transferred from central government to the local authorities the duty of providing a maternity and child welfare service. It exempted agriculture absolutely from rates and introduced a 25% derating for productive industry and for freight transport. Finally, and most well known, it substituted for some Exchequer percentage grants a system of block grants.

As this summary indicates, the 1929 Act was to an extent retrospective: that is, to use a phrase employed in the Ministry of Health's annual report, it remedied certain defects in the established system of local government.[1] In seeking to rectify them, it marked not a departure but a series of corrections to the status quo; and, though it was partly a parliamentary tactic so to represent it, it can -

1 Tenth Annual Report of the Ministry of Health, 1928-29 (Cmd. 3362), p. 2

and will - be argued that the 1929 Act terminated an extended period of inquiry during which reforms had been postponed again and again.

At the same time the act changed the basis of the relationship between town halls in England and Wales and the departments of central government. There are two senses in which this change can now be perceived. First: in replacing with block grants a number of the expenditure grants paid by the Treasury to each local authority council in respect of certain specified services; and second: in establishing a needs formula by which to calculate the size of each council's block grant.[1] In both respects the 1929 Act established precedents that were to be followed by subsequent legislation. Indeed criticism of the block grant formula employed in the act was directed not at its use but its criteria; that is, on the question of whether or not the chosen measures of need accurately reflected local authorities' needed expenditure.

In its abolition of the boards of guardians and in its increase of county and county borough councils' public health responsibilities, the 1929 Act merely implemented proposals

1 The origins of expenditure grants and the emergence of a needs formula as the basis of the block grant are described in the following section

that had been made several times before. In exempting agriculture from the rates, the act simply increased exemptions granted by Parliament in 1896 and 1923. It was in its extension of the derating principle to 'productive' industry that the act broke new ground. Moreover this last feature of the act requires explanation for it sits oddly amongst clauses that have to do with reform of central-local relations and with the aggrandisement of the duties of county and county borough councils.

This caused parliamentary comment at the time. Arthur Greenwood, who introduced the Labour Party's case against the bill, asserted that:

> 'This Bill would never have been heard of if the Government had not been forced to deal with the problems of local rating . . . It originated out of the present state of trade; it originated out of the employment problem. The germ of it . . . was born in the fertile and feverish brain of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.'[1]

It is a view adopted by some later commentators, notably Newcomer and Churchill's official biographer. The former thought that the 'principal reason' for the act was its

1 Hansard, 5th series, 1928, ccxxiii. 108

derating element.[1] Gilbert's biography of Churchill suggests a similar interpretation. In it Churchill is portrayed as the energetic partner in an uneasy alliance with Chamberlain, peddling ambitious plans under the persistent but fortunately ineffective restraint of an allegedly cautious and narrow-minded Minister of Health.[2] Detailed analysis of documents other than those preserved in Churchill's own papers suggests a different conclusion.

This chapter seeks to answer the question: which minister and which government department was responsible for the drafting of the bill? Was it the product of Treasury officials' determination to limit the Exchequer's contribution to local authority spending, of a Chancellor anxious to assist industry by relieving it of a quarter of its rate burden, or of the Ministry of Health's long-term plans for the reform of local government?

We begin our examination with an account of the evolution of the central-local financial relationship. Too often this perspective is not provided. It is an exceedingly complex subject; but it is also one of the hidden dramas of English history in which fundamental political issues - for example,

1 Newcomer op.cit., p. 206

2 Martin Gilbert Winston S Churchill: volume v 1922-1939, (London, 1976), chapter 13

the degree of local autonomy and variety permissible and desirable in a centralising, unitary state - occasionally peep coyly from beneath dense layers of technical discussion.

2. LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

At the beginning of the previous chapter, we saw that in the opinion of the permanent secretary at the Ministry of Health there was by the 1920s 'a measure of incongruity' between local authorities' areas and functions. In the words of two less circumspect experts, the complexities of the local government system were 'so chaotic and senseless as to defy analysis and almost to baffle description.'[1] Similar conclusions have been reached about the state of local government finance. The Royal Commission on Local Taxation, which reported in 1901, observed that:

> "It is not easy to explain the anomalies of the present system, or rather systems of allocation. Perhaps it is not too much to say that it may not have lasted as long as it has if its obscurity and complexity had not made it almost impossible for the public to follow."[2]

Sidney Webb though it "a chaos which practically no one understands."[3] He did not exclude himself from the

1 Sidney and Beatrice Webb A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain (with an introduction by Samuel H Beer, London, 1975), p. 208

2 C D Foster, R A Jackman and M Perlman Local Government Finance in a Unitary state (London, 1980), p. 172

3 loc.cit.

incomprehending. "I hope that I have got all these complications right; but it is impossible to feel sure," he commented in an exposition of the distribution of education grants.[1]

This section imposes an order on the chaos by restricting its discussion to grants-in-aid: that is, to subventions made by the Exchequer to local authorities in aid of expenditure incurred in providing services. The choice is not an arbitrary one made purely from convenience. The subject is chosen because in the 1920s debates over the financing of local government services focused on the form of Exchequer contributions to local authorities. Other issues were examined, sometimes at length and in great detail; but at the core of them lay the question: how much could central government intervene in local authorities' activities to promote by financial inducements of various kinds the services it thought desirable whilst at the same time promoting and guarding the autonomy of the local government system?

The debates of the 1920s over the proper balance between rates and taxes in the funding of local authority expenditure presented this question in its clearest form. It did so because of the massive increase in central subventions.

1 P J Waller Town, City, and Nation (Oxford, 1983), p.263

The total value of Exchequer grants to local government rose fourfold between 1913-14 and 1928-29. In order to comprehend this development, it is necessary to describe the evolution of grants-in-aid as a means of supporting local services which the fiscal resources of local government were incapable of covering on their own account.

Central government's intervention in the spending of local authorities may be traced certainly to the second quarter of the nineteenth century. In 1835 central funds were made available to councils of counties to cover half of the cost of criminal prosecutions. Ten years later, Poor Law Unions received from the Exchequer sums equivalent to half the salaries of their medical officers. From 1856 central government contributed 25% of local authorities' expenditure on their police forces. 1870 marked a watershed. In that year the new school boards attracted grants that were designed to assist poorer areas. Progressively over the following decade, local authorities received Exchequer assistance in respect of the salaries of medical officers of health and sanitary inspectors, the care of pauper lunatics, the registration of births and deaths, and industrial schools. Between 1868 and 1888 contributions from taxation in support of a widening range of local authority services increased from £0.8 to over £4 million.

Although these subventions were clearly made ad hoc, they established three justifications: first, as a means of attaining equity as between different localities; second, so as to stimulate local action; and third, in order to secure broadly compatible standards of provision throughout the country as a whole. Percentage grants (subventions paid by the Exchequer a percentage, agreed in advance, of the total cost to a local authority of a particular service) were increasingly employed to attain these objectives.

Percentage grants were attractive to central government because the ratio of payment could be fixed in advance. As no central subvention was made until a local authority had committed a proportion of its own financial resources, Parliament could be certain that its contribution would be used for the purpose for which it was intended. Finally the use of percentage grants maintained the principle of the local identification and meeting of local needs whilst allowing Parliament, through the supervision of the appropriate government department, to specify standards and to require that local authorities receiving its assistance adhere to them.

Local authorities found percentage grants to their liking for similar reasons. An expenditure basis offered the security of central government's assistance without the disincentive

of a chronological or a financial limitation on the total subvention. Parliament's imposition of new duties and new standards of service provision was tolerable to local authorities hamstrung by inflexible fiscal bases only if they were offered substantial assistance. Lastly, though subjected to supervision of various kinds by departments of state whose ministers were answerable for the proper use of taxpayers' money, local authorities enjoyed substantial if increasingly restricted discretion as to the form and the nature of provision of their grant-aided services.

The Local Government Act of 1888, the brain-child of Goschen, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, marked the first review of this burgeoning system of ad hoc assistance. Goschen sought to abandon the bureaucratically cumbersome business of the annual review of these subventions. He proposed to replace the system with a central local taxation account into which would be paid expansive revenues derived from certain excise duties and licences. These revenues would then be transferred to each county council's Exchequer contribution account, thereby becoming available for dispersal in support of services as the recipient authority thought fit.

Goschen's scheme was ingenious. It offered ratepayers the prospect of local authorities limited to gradually increasing assigned revenues that had nothing to do with property

valuation; and taxpayers that of greatly diminished appeals for Exchequer funding of local services. It was ingenious, but it was ineffective. Its ineffectiveness was partly intrinsic and partly made so by subsequent events. In the first category was the limited application of the scheme, for it left untouched grants for education and even in 1888 these comprised sums that exceeded the total of all other central subventions. The assigned revenues soon proved to be incapable of the expansion necessary to relieve local authorities of the need to call for Exchequer assistance. Within two years of the passage of the 1888 Act, central government provided funds for the slaughtering of diseased cattle. Further subventions were called for with the introduction of fee-less elementary education in 1891. With the implementation in 1896 of the recommendation of the second report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture that agricultural land should be derated by 50%, the Exchequer was obliged to add the same amount from taxation funds to restore the loss to local authorities' income.

The figures suggest that the assigned revenues system never achieved its purpose in restoring financial autonomy to local government. Local authorities' total expenditure in 1889-90 was £4.8 million: by 1901-02 it had risen to £87 million. Though there was a sharp increase in the average rate during the same period from 3/8.2d per £ to 5/3.8d per £, aggregate debts mounted from £200 million to £347 million.

Grants-in-aid were thus necessary supplements to local authorities' own resources. They grew quickly from about £6.5 million in 1890 to about £60.6 million in 1920, and to just over £80 million in 1927. Furthermore the implicit distinction between local and national financial responsibilities, so attractive at first glance, was too subtle to bear the pressure of a central government in a unitary state whose involvement in national life was growing inexorably.

The Royal Commission on Local Taxation, which reported in 1901, subjected Goschen's settlement to careful scrutiny. The commissioners signed three reports, of which the final one was divided between a minority under the chairman, Lord Balfour of Burleigh, and a majority. The latter's view was broadly that the percentage system should be retained but that central government ought to assume financial responsibility for certain services, the local authorities concerned becoming in effect central government's administrative agents.

The minority recommended a more fundamental recasting of the financing of local government. The report was critical of the payment of Exchequer subventions on an expenditure basis on the grounds that such a system encouraged a rigidification of administration that in turn made it more, not less, difficult to secure the results Parliament had had in view.

The report's signatories argued that regular inspection by officials of the government department concerned would be more effective than open-ended grants. It was also clear to the commissioners that percentage grants weakened the Treasury's control. Increasingly its function was merely to pay for decisions to incur expenditure in which it had - at best - only a secondary involvement.

For the purposes of the present discussion, the most significant of the minority report's recommendations were those that related to the proposal to abandon itemised expenditure subventions and to replace them with a grant equal to 50% of the recipient local authority's total spending. This block grant would be calculated every ten years, and any savings achieved by the authority concerned would be to its advantage just as additional expenditure would be to its disadvantage.

The formula on which the grant was to be calculated was especially significant. It was to be based on an authority's actual expenditure but it aimed to take into account on the one hand the cost of meeting particualr needs, and on the other wealth as measured by revenues. A 'needs' formula was devised the effect of which was to bring closer together the capacities of differing local authorities to provide similar services to those residing within their areas. The formula

accordingly included a calculation that set population against its ability to pay.

The Royal Commission on Local Taxation is justly celebrated for its minority's advocacy of block grants, and especially for the skill with which it juxtaposed the advantages to central and local government alike of financial subventions made on that principle. It allowed the Treasury to determine the total of its support in advance of giving it. Each local authority could be relieved of ministerial supervision of the minutiae of its spending. Equally important was the set of recommendations not made by Balfour of Burleigh's enquiry. It did not seek to follow Goschen, who had provided local authorities with expansible financial resources that were not subjected to direct Treasury control; and it avoided a local income tax. Instead the minority report drew a distinction between those it called national and onerous services and those it designated local and beneficial. The former would accordingly attract grants-in-aid whilst the latter would be supported by rates.

National services, the minority believed, were those required by central government, which set nationwide standards, and had no direct benefit to the ratepayer. They were administered locally not least for administrative convenience but performed in the interests of the community at large and

not for a particular segment of it. Falling into this category were poor relief, police, criminal prosecutions, education, and main roads. Beneficial services, on the other hand, contributed directly to the amenity of the locality. They were largely optional not mandatory, and local authorities had discretion over their quality and quantity. It was argued that these services should thus be paid for through the rates according to local political decisions as to the value of the benefits received.

The minority admitted that these categories were not entirely separate from one another. Moreover it asserted powerfully that national services ought to be administered locally on the grounds that they required the personal knowledge of individuals and circumstances, the minute supervision, and the investigation that only the locality concerned could provide. Consequently there should be a close formal connection between central government, the taxing authority that supported these services; and the unit of local administration that spent the funds thereby received.

These were practical reasons: ideological ones were also crucial. The minority was anxious to slow down what it perceived to be a hastening tendency towards centralisation for it believed that greater strain on the machinery of government might lead to its breakdown. Accordingly it

emphasised the need to preserve local independence by extending and encouraging local government. These views served to make the distinction between local and national services less precise than it might have been. They prevented the minority from concluding that the Exchequer ought to become responsible for all - or at least the greater part of - expenditure incurred in providing the so-called national services, and that local authorities should be obliged to fund those services thought to be beneficial only or chiefly to their immediate communities.

The government did not act on either set of the Balfour Committee's recommendations. The growth of Exchequer subventions, which it had set out to stem, continued at an increasing rate. The £6.5 million of 1890 was translated into £12.2 million in 1900, and into £20.9 million in 1910. Government policy worsened the position. The Finance Act of 1910 and the Revenue Act of the following year weakened the assigned revenues system, already grossly inadequate, by setting the most flexible of the duties paid into councils' Exchequer contribution accounts (those on beer, spirits, and motor car licences) at the levels of 1908-09, the difference disappearing into central government's general taxation

revenue.[1]

It was clear that the assigned revenues system had failed to secure the levels of equity, local action and compatibility sought from it; nor had it removed local authorities' need to have recourse to Exchequer subventions. Indeed central government's response to the deficiencies of Goschen's scheme had been to increase the number and value of grants-in-aid. It was accordingly reluctant to part with any source of revenue that might otherwise be allotted to local authorities in order to decrease their dependence on Exchequer subventions. A departmental committee on local taxation, which reported in 1914, well expressed this view in turning down proposals to expand the assigned revenues by the addition of an amusement tax: "(it) would deprive the Imperial Exchequer of a potential source of revenue."[2]

The committee grappled productively with the requirement to find a replacement for the system of assigned revenues. It recognised the coalescence of national and local services,

1 The Royal Commission on Local Taxation had recommended that local authorities set and raise the duties making up the assigned revenues. The present government's proposals in respect of dog licences represent a belated and partial implementation

2 C D Foster et al. op.cit., p. 131 (The departmental committee on local taxation is usually known as the Kempe committee after the surname of its chairman, Sir John Kempe, who had retired in 1911 from the post of Comptroller and Auditor-General)

and described those concerned as semi-national. These would receive grants-in-aid and would be subjected to strong central control, the local authorities becoming in effect Westminster's agents. Semi-national services would be the largest of the committee's three categories, for its national and its local services were both small groups. In addition it recommended a block grant for education, a block and a percentage grant for poor relief, and a block grant of 50% for local police services, subject only to adherence to Home Office regulations. The outbreak of war prevented consideration of these interesting proposals.

In the immediate postwar years the Treasury set up three committees to examine aspects of central government's subventions to local authorities. Not one of them produced clear recommendations attractive in their entirety to ministers; but the reports presented by these committees contained recommendations many of which appeared in the Local Government Act of 1929. Their work must be set in the context of retrenchment and of the Treasury's determination to exert control over public expenditure. This put the Ministry of Health and other 'spending' departments on the defensive.

The first of these three committees was chaired by Sir Henry Bunbury, a senir civil servant from the Treasury, and was

composed entirely of officials. It examined an especially abstruse facet of the central-local financial relationship: the auditing of local authorities' grant aided accounts. The Treasury seemed to have believed that increases in central subventions to local expenditure might be limited, and perhaps reversed, by more effective administrative control of the existing system by government departments. As its secretary subsequently revealed:

> 'The Committee were not asked to examine the system of grant nor the method on which grant aided accounts were kept but their attention was solely directed to the question of audit of such accounts.'[1]

The principles underlying the existing system of Exchequer grants were not discussed.

It was clear from Bunbury's report that auditing procedures of greater precision could not be expected to achieve the results the Treasury wanted. Moreover the Treasury's determination first to limit and then to reduce the Exchequer's contribution to local expenditure was sharpened within a year of the committee's report by political demands for retrenchment. These were most cogently expressed by the three reports of the Committee on National Expenditure

1 PRO, HLG 52/345: D F C Blunt to E F C Mosse, 27 February 1923

chaired by Sir Eric Geddes MP.[1] These urged the government to reduce its spending and recommended the abolition of no less than five departments of state. The reports, known collectively as the Geddes Axe, cast a shadow over those involved in the reframing of local-central relations.

Officials in the Ministry of Health were broadly in favour of retaining the percentage system. Stutchbury, the assistant secretary with responsibility for maternity and child welfare, argued that 'the percentage basis (was) the most satisfactory one for this service.'[2] De Montmorency, a principal, produced a savage assault on the Geddes Committee's contentions that percentage grants were a 'money spending device,' that they removed control from Parliament and encouraged extravagance, and that fixed grants would increase the incentive for local authorities to economise, thus reducing the tax-payer's burden and enabling staff economies to be made by central government.[3] Stutchbury's and de Montmorency's were the views of civil servants concerned with particular services and anxious to protect them.

1 Committee on National Expenditure: first, second, and third reports, 1922,(Cd. 1581, 1582, 1589): Parl. Papers 1922, ix. 1, 173, 287

2 PRO, HLG 52/342: Stutchbury to Robinson, 17 March 1922

3 PRO, HLG 52/342: de Montmorency to Maclachlan, April 1922

Robinson summarised these criticisms in a note to the Minister of Health, Sir Alfred Mond. He pointed out that the Minister had instructed the department to submit evidence to the Geddes Committee that was critical of grants dependent on expenditure, but that the Ministry's submission had also observed that it could not readily see an alternative. Robinson noted that the rationing scheme recommended by Geddes had been adopted by the department at Mond's request, but that it could not be regarded as a substitute for percentage grants. He concluded by reminding Mond that there existed a departmental view yet that it was 'inextricably bound up with a reorganisation of the whole system of local government consequent on the abolition of the poor law,' and there seemed no prospect of achieving that 'in the near future.'[1]

The comments of Robinson and his junior colleagues suggest that the Ministry's officials were not content to abandon grants calculated on an expenditure basis and to replace them with a system of central subventions dependent on the Treasury's control which the department would be obliged to

1 PRO, HLG 52/342: Robinson to Mond, 25 May 1922

impose on local authorities. They sought a middle way between the Scylla of percentage grants and the Charybdis of Exchequer intervention.

In response to the Geddes Committee's reports, members of the Cabinet whose departments were most directly affected by Geddes' strictures began to look for less draconian proposals to meet the need, which they admitted, to reduce the value of central subventions. Mond wrote to H A L Fisher, the President of the Board of Education, in February 1922, suggesting another committee to examine the issues.[1] He implied that what was wanted was an enquiry that was not ruthlessly determined to find evidence to match preordained conclusions, as he and his officials believed Geddes' had been: 'I think that on the present occasion we require a different sort of committee.' It would have as chairman an ex-Cabinet minister and members taken from both sides of the House of Commons 'with a professional element representing finance and accounting.' We need, Mond continued, people with experience of local government. They should not be active in it: if they were, the committee's work would be stifled by representations from the local authority associations. Fisher agreed. That he wanted a committee that had the interests of the 'spending' departments at least as closely at heart at the Geddes Committee had had those of

1 PRO, HLG 52/342: Mond to Fisher, 24 February 1922

the Treasury is indicated by his belief that Beveridge would make a good member of it.[1] The result of this ministerial agreement was the second of the three Treasury committees.

The Committee on Exchequer Grants was set up in April 1922. The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced its terms of reference as being:

> 'To report what system of Exchquer grants in respect of locally administered services assisted from the Exchequer can be substituted for the percentage grant system, and to what extent and with what exceptions, if any, the alternative system can be applied.'[2]

The chairman of the committee was Lord Meston, who had retired in 1919 from the Indian Civil Service in which he had had a distinguished career as the financial secretary to two provincial administrations and to the Indian government. 'His gift for conciliation amounted to genius;'[3] moreover his experience was directly relevant. After the passing of the Government of India Act of 1919, Meston had devised a system of provincial contributions to the central exchequer that varied according to circumstances.

1 PRO, HLG 52/342: Fisher to Mond, 28 February 1922

2 Hansard, 5th series, 1922, clii. 2019

3 Dictionary of National Biography 1941-50, p. 587

There were seven other members so selected as to give equal representation to the three major political parties; and, indeed, opinion was to divide along party political lines.[1] The seventh member, Sir Harry Haward, was an Electricity Commissioner who had been for twenty-seven years Comptroller of London County Council. The committee's secretary, E F C Mosse, was a principal at the Ministry of Health; and H G Vincent, the assistant secretary, was one of the Treasury's assistant principals.

The committee's members had been carefully chosen for the Treasury wanted to monitor their thinking. Lloyd George had at first sought Lord Chalmers as chairman on the ground that 'he alone of the other members knows the Treasury mind.'[2] The Chancellor's private secretary had recommended that one of the department's junior officials should be appointed as the committee's assistant secretary 'to ensure that the

1 The six MPs were: W Graham, Edinburgh Central (Lab.); Arthur Henderson, Widnes (Lab.); J Hinds, Carmarthen (Coalition Lib.); J Stanley Holmes, Derbyshire NE (Lib.); J Kidd, Linlithgowshire (Cons.); and Sidney Peel, Uxbridge (Cons.). The last three might be expected to be sympathetic to the Treasury line (Holmes had chaired a small Treasury committee which had produced a report in 1920 broadly supporting a reduction in the staffing levels of the Department of Overseas Trade; Kidd was the parliamentary secretary to the Scottish Board of Health; and Peel was a financial adviser to the Foreign Office)

2 PRO, T 160/128/F 4751: comment by Lloyd George, Mond to Lloyd George, 7 March 1922

Treasury is kept fully in touch with what is going on.'[1]

The Treasury was determined to be presented with a clear recommendation to abolish the percentage basis. Its spokesman to the committee, Sir George Barstow, was emphatic on the evils of grants determined by expenditure. He declared that the percentage grant:

> 'Destroys financial control all along the line. It destroys all financial control locally and of the Central Department, and the financial control of the Exchequer finally.'[2]

This was a reiteration of the Geddes Committe's assertions.

The committee met twenty-seven times between June 1922 and March 1923. It began by sending a questionnaire to local authorities and to associations representing groups providing services in the localities. Government departments submitted statements, and the committee heard evidence from senior civil servants and from representatives of other interested parties. In February 1923 the committee met to consider its views, and the chairman afterwards went away to prepare a draft report. A rough draft of its first chapters was

1 PRO, T 160/128/F 4751: Grigg to Horne, 11 May 1922

2 PRO,HLG 52/320: Oral Evidence of Government Departments, Sir George Barstow (Treasury)

circulated in September. The chairman wrote a report in 1926, but his colleagues never discussed it.

Meston's account of the committee's first meeting showed that some members resented the implication inherent in the terms of reference that percentage grants had to be dispensed with. Meston reflected these views in a letter to the Chancellor's private secretary.[1]

> 'We are not disposed to accept the Geddes Committee's condemnation without some evidence: and we are not yet convinced that the percentage system is always and in all circumstances wrong.'

He went on to ask that the Treasury give evidence to the committee first of all.

> 'As I understand the position, we are a part of your machinery for checking the growth of national expenditure and for, if possible, reducing the existing scale of expenditure. If this were impressed on us at the beginning, I think that it would keep us from wandering into sterile investigations of the comparative advantages, incidence, etc. of different forms of taxation.'

1 PRO, T 161/128/F 4751: Meston to Grigg, 27 June 1922

Grigg's reply succinctly described the Treasury's expectations of Meston's committee.[1] He reported that the Chancellor thought that:

> 'Your Committee should take it that the Cabinet are definitely opposed in the existing financial circumstances to the continuance of the present system of percentage grants where a more satisfactory alternative can be found for it.'

He went on to make clear what he meant by 'satisfactory:' the committee ought to commend 'practicable alternatives suitable for the present time.' Grigg added that the Chancellor hoped that it would not be necessary 'to inquire into the theoretical merits of the percentage grant system.'[1]

Meston was at first prepared to do what the Treasury required of him, and others on the committee also encouraged him to adopt a determined stance against the expenditure basis of exchequer grants. Peel, a financial adviser to the Foreign Office, sent in a memorandum recommending inter alia that the committee's provisional conclusions should be submitted to the appropriate government departments before the final draft was prepared. Kidd, a member of the government, wanted:

> 'To see some line taken by our Committee which beginning with a stop

1 PRO, T161/128/F 4751: Grigg to Meston, 3 July 1922

> to its growth would naturally tend
> towards the total destruction in time
> of the percentage system.'

It was, he wrote, a 'horse leech': 9d for 4d was simply too great a temptation for local authorities to heed central government's pleas for economy.[1] 'My position,' Kidd declared during one of the committee's meetings, '... will be ... the possibility of the complete cessation of percentage grants.'[2]

On the other side, Meston found himself opposed by the two representatives of the Labour Party. Responding to the chairman's draft of the first part of the committee's report, Graham remarked shortly that little criticism could be offered until what he called the substantive sanctions had been reached. Henderson was emphatic. He objected to the summary of the merits and demerits of the percentage system as they had been set out in the evidence of government departments. In addition he believed that Meston had treated superficially the alleged extravagance of local authorities. To what extent, Henderson asked appositely, was the increase in their expenditure on certain services due not to the

1 India Office Library and Records, MSS Eur F 136/36: Kidd to Meston, 20 September 1923

2 PRO, HLG 52/346: Evidence of Sir Henry Bunbury and Mr A E Weston, 6 March 1923

nature of the grant but to changes in national policy?[1]

The committee continued to meet regularly in the first two months of 1923, holding a final session in March. In July the Chancellor, Snowden, secured the withdrawal of Henderson and Graham, now Home Secretary and Financial Secretary respectively, on the grounds that:

> 'It would be unusual and rather embarassing to us as a Government as well as to you that you should continue to serve.'[2]

Clearly the Treasury hoped that with their removal a final report would be completed rapidly and agreed unanimously; but, by the resignation of the minority Labour administration in October, no report had been received. A senior Treasury official wrote to Meston in November asking for the committee's views for the new government, observing that with its accession 'the excuse for the withdrawal from the Committee of dissentient elements no longer holds good.'[3]

This disingenuousness was in vain. Meston appeared to have abandoned all prospect of his committee producing a report.

1 India Office Library and Records, MSS Eur F 136/36: Graham to Meston, 18 September 1923; Henderson to Meston, 4 October 1923

2 PRO, T 161/128/F 4751: Snowden to Henderson, 7 July 1924

3 PRO, T 161/128/F 4751: Barstow to Meston, 10 November 1924

He did not reply until January, and then from Khartoum, pleading ill-health during the winter and promising a return to work very shortly.

The difficulty confronting Meston was that there was no prospect of obtaining the support of the two Labour MPs, now in opposition, to the report the Treasury wanted from him. The government now found itself under pressure in the Commons. Macdonald and Webb, amongst other Labour MPs, challenged the Chancellor at regular intervals to produce either Lord Meston's report or his committee's evidence. In March 1926, an article in The Times asserted that Meston had circulated a draft to the members of his committee, and that it argued that the percentage system should be abandoned and, after a period of transition, a new scheme adopted.[1] Shortly after Webb had drawn the Chancellor's attention to this peice, McNeill, the Financial Secretary, decided:

> 'That the time had arrived when Parliament is entitled to know the real facts of the case, which is a very remarkable one, very rare indeed in the conduct of public business in this country, if not unprecedented altogether - though perhaps it might be found in some Oriental countries where procrastination has been brought to the highest state of perfection.'[2]

1 The Times, 16 March 1926

2 Hansard, 5th series, 1926, cxcvii. 689

Meston thus received the whole blame for his committee's failure to produce a report.

In fact he had had no room to manoeuvre between Henderson and Graham on one side, and the Treasury on the other. From the earliest days of the committee's existence, it was clear that the political divisions between Meston's colleagues were too fundamental to be bridged even by a carefully phrased report; and that parliamentary controversy was inevitable if the enquiry was continued. Accordingly McNeill observed: 'the government are now proceeding upon different lines.'[1]

Not the least of Meston's difficulties had been that most of the dozen or so representatives of local authorities and other bodies receiving central subventions in the form of percentage grants submitted evidence to the committee strongly advocating the continuance of the existing system.[2] For example, the honorary secretary of the Association of Education Committees observed that:

> 'It is significant that an Amendment proposed on behalf of the St Helen's Education Committee, in favour of a block grant system as against a percentage system, could not find a seconder.'[3]

1 ibid., 694

2 The submissions may be found in PRO, HLG 52/307-347

3 PRO, HLG 52/314: Evidence of Association of Education Committees, F J Leslie to E F C Mosse, 6 November 1922

Other spokesmen had put the case for retaining the percentage system even more strongly. In addition the Home Office, Ministry of Transport, and Board of Education witnesses expressed themselves to be satisfied with the existing pattern and type of subventions.

With the Meston Committee ineffective, the Cabinet turned to an interdepartmental committee composed of civil servants. In April 1926 the Treasury gathered together a group of eleven officials: two each from Education, from Health, and from the Home Office; and one each from the Treasury, from Transport, and from the Scottish Education and Health Departments. Sir George Barstow of the Treasury was appointed chairman, and he was asked by the Chancellor to submit his committee's report within a month.

The terms of reference of this, the last of the Treasury's three committees on central-local financial relations during the 1920s, were similar but less prescriptive than those of Lord Meston. Where Meston had been required to find a new system of Exchequer grants and to account for the exceptions 'if any' that would have to be made in implementing it, Barstow was asked simply to consider the issue. As the Treasury minute explained:

> 'His Majesty's Government have decided that the question of the substitution for percentage grants of grants

> independent of expenditure .... should first be explored by an Inter-Departmental Committee.'[1]

The word 'first' must have been a sarcastic reflection on the Meston Committee's unproductiveness.

As it turned out, Barstow's committee was only a little less coy on the future of Exchequer grants than Meston's had been. The committee's interim - but only - report concentrated on the immediate problem posed by the government's acceptance of the 1925 Burnham award, which fixed teachers' salaries for six years. The report noted that:

> 'We understand that the most immediately pressing subject on which we are asked to report is the policy to be adopted at once in regard to education grants.'[2]

The committee tried to make recommendations which were 'consistent with Government policy generally, and should lead up to, rather than impede, an ultimate simplification' of Exchequer grants.[3] It failed. Having accepted the

1 PRO, T 161/265/S 29358: Terms of Reference for the Inter-Departmental Committee on Grants, 26 April 1926

2 PRO, HLG 52/388: Inter-Departmental Committee on Grants, interim report, paragraph 10

3 loc. cit.

Burnham award, the committee reasoned that the government was obliged to maintain the percentage system so far as education salaries were concerned until it could amend section 118 of the 1921 Education Act. It was clear that the committee regarded the Cabinet's decision on the issued, which it described archly as 'a Parliamentary and political one,' as making more difficult a departure from the percentage system.[1] Though its interim report also blamed the general strike for disrupting the committee's timetable, there can be no doubt that the signatories believed that the government had cut the ground from beneath them.

But the committee's report did not represent the entirety of its authors' discussion nor the end of its deliberations. Three sub-committees were formed, each to examine a particular problem identified by the report. One investigated rural areas under a block grant, another minor authorities, and the third grants to non-local education authorities. Their conclusions and those of the committee proper provided occasion for a number of schemes, each of which endeavoured to improved on its predecessor. They are significant for our study for in them lie the origins of many of the clauses of the 1929 Act but, to avoid a long and detailed analysis, let us consider one example only.

1 ibid., paragraph 27

Scheme M was submitted by Hurst, the Treasury official on the committee, to meet objections to scheme J. In it Hurst tried to respond to the need, felt increasingly by the committee, to mitigate or to remove the discrimination against certain authorities which, because they were energetic or sought high standards of services or were predominantly rural in character, would otherwise have been disadvantaged by a block grant formula intended to apply to all local authorities.

The interim report argued that:

> 'It is not in the national interest to neutralise completely the natural disadvantages of the least favoured areas.'[1]

Three reasons were given: first that it was difficult to do so; second, that local variety ought to be preserved; and last, that local authorities would tend:

> 'To argue that nearly all differences of cost were unavoidable, and the Government would be driven back to an expenditure basis.'[2]

To counteract these problems, Hurst proposed corrective factors in the grant formula that would nearly more equate benefit and need. One of his suggestions, population per mile of road hitherto grant aided, was to appear in the 1929 Act.

1 ibid., paragraph 20

2 loc. cit.

Barstow's committee was the third and final attempt to produce an agreed set of conclusions which the government could employ to make its departure from commitment to the percentage grant system. After 1926 discussion within central government about the nature of local authorities' financial relationship with the Exchequer was conducted between the departments of state principally involved. The outcome was the 1929 Act. These three committees were to make important contributions to this measure, but it is on the roles of the two Cabinet ministers chiefly concerned with it, Churchill and Chamberlain, that our examination now devolves.

This discussion of the evolution of the system of grants-in-aid has revealed that debate about the proper financing of local government has been almost as long-lived as the modern system itself. The issues concerned have always beeen - and remain - exceedingly technical, and the 1920s were to see refinements of great sophistication made to proposals advanced before the outbreak of war. But the most important conclusion to draw from this examination is that there was nothing in the clauses of the Local Government Act of 1929 dealing with the recasting of local authority finance that did not have its origins in the enquiries of Lord Balfour of Burleigh and Sir John Kempe.

3. DRAFTING THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT BILL, 1928: CHAMBERLAIN VERSUS CHURCHILL

We have seen that by May 1921 the Ministry of Health had a set of proposals for reforms of the Poor Law, the organisation and functions of local authorities, and the Exchequer's subventions in aid of local authority expenditure.[1] The essential feature of these proposals was the abolition of the assigned revenues system and its substitution by block grants based on need. Without this change, the Ministry's officials reasoned, county and county borough councils could not be persuaded to accept the Poor Law functions which the department intended to transfer to them from the boards of guardians.

It is not at first clear why the Ministry believed that only with this fundamental recasting of local authority finance would it prove possible to abolish the guardians. After all, local authorities - and, indeed, some government departments - remained strongly in favour of Exchequer grants calculated on an expenditure basis; and in all likelihood the Ministry's attempts to convert them to the attractions of block grants would accordingly be strongly resisted.

1 See above, chapter four, section two

The explanation lies in the attractions the department saw for local government in the particular block grant it now recommended. First: by doing away with itemised percentage grants, the Ministry could claim that it would be able to reduce its detailed supervision of local authority expenditure. As excessive supervision had been one of the enduring complaints of local authorities, the department anticipated that much of the hostility to block grants exhibited by them in the past would thereby be at least substantially diminished. Second: the needs formula on which the department proposed to base its block grants would be especially advantageous for authorities with low average rateable values. These authorities were constrained by fiscal bases inadequate for the task of supporting independent provision of service and, consequently, for the attraction of Exchequer subventions calculated on local authority expenditure.

One of the chief difficulties for the Ministry of Health's scheme lay in the need to coordinate its policy with other government departments whose responsibilities required them to have dealings with the various units making up the local government system. First and foremost amongst these was the Treasury, which had overall control of departmental sanction of local authority activities involving expenditure: but a system of block grants offered it the prospect of fixing for a number of years its financial liabilities in respect of

local government well in advance and at one remove from the pressures exerted by local politicians. This had been its principal demand in evidence to the Meston Committee.[1] Consequently the Ministry anticipated little opposition from that quarter. Indeed Treasury officials were not unsympathetic either to the Ministry of Health's aim to reduce the supervision by central government of local authority expenditure. They insisted that this goal must be linked to the introduction of block grants.

> 'We have always taken the line that one must get away from the percentage system of grants before one can reduce the powers of Depts. to check expenditure.'[2]

The introduction of block grants can thus be seen as an attempt to diminish the minutiae of central government's regulation of local spending whilst at the same time defining its limits, the former the interest of the Ministry of Health and the latter that of the Treasury.

Much more problematic for the Ministry of Health was the gaining of the support of the Home Office, the Board of Education, and the Ministry of Transport. Each one of these departments was convinced of the attractions of the existing

1 See above, section two

2 PRO, T 161/248/26702: Hurst to Barstow, nd

system on the grounds that it promoted the particular service for which they were responsible. The Home Office argued that percentage grants acted as an effective restraint on local profligacy of expenditure on police forces and as a means of ensuring maintenance of national standards of pay, conditions, and performance. It was thought that education inequalities were best combatted by expenditure based subventions; and that local knowledge of road use was better employed by grants calculated by local expenditure than on any other basis.

In 1926 Lord Eustace Percy, the President of the Board of Education, declared his conversion to the cause of block grants but against the advice both of his officials and of his parliamentary secretary, the Duchess of Atholl.[1] Discussions were opened between the permanent staffs of the Board and the Ministry of Health, and it soon became clear that Percy's ideas could not readily be welded into a practicable scheme.[2] Nor was Chamberlain immediately able to win round either the Home Secretary or the Secretary of State for Scotland. Both were intransigently opposed to the general introduction of block grants.

1 PRO, Ed 24/1329: Percy to Baldwin, 18 December 1925 (see also PRO, Ed 24/1326 & /1389)

2 PRO, MH 57/146: Memorandum by Sir Aubrey Symonds, nd (See also PRO, Ed 24/1329; HLG 29/262 & 52/387)

By the beginning of 1927, no progress had been made by the Cabinet in implementing Chamberlain's provisional programme to introduce legislation to reform the Poor Law during the course of the 1926 parliamentary session. There seemed little prospect of Chamberlain securing the support of those of his Cabinet colleagues whose departments' responsibilities also involved liaison with local authorities. Chamberlain himself occasionally despaired of ever securing Cabinet approval. At the end of 1926, he had written to his half-sister, Hilda:

> 'Well, I don't intend to threaten resignation but I should make myself very disagreeable if I don't get my way and I am quite aware that I am an asset and not a liability of the Government.'[1]

In vain Chamberlain argued that the party could not hope to win the forthcoming general election without a major measure of social reform to its credit. The disquiet of the majority of Cabinet ministers, far from abating, nevertheless increased. Baldwin responded to it. 'The PM has got very cold feet again,' Chamberlain recorded wryly, 'and the (Chief Whip and the Party Chairman) are assiduously laying ice packs to his extremeties.'[2] Faced with the Cabinet's opposition

1 NC 18/1/553: Neville to Hilda Chamberlain, 11 December 1926

2 NC 18/1/565: Neville to Hilda Chamberlain, 5 March 1927

and the Prime Minister's lack of enthusiasm, Chamberlain resolved to proceed by stages, block granting health services and subsequently adding education, police and roads in successive steps.

This incremental approach did not satisfy the Chancellor, Winston Churchill. He had been an advocate of block grants for some time, and on grounds that did not differ from the views expressed by the senior Treasury official who had given evidence to the Meston Committee. As Churchill had explained with a colourful exaggeration, the problem for the Treasury with grants calculated on an expenditure basis was that 'the local authorities call the tune and it only remains to calculate the percentage upon which the Exchequer pays the piper.' But by March 1927 Churchill had become so exasperated by the opposition of his Cabinet colleagues that he 'declared his desire to drop block grants altogether.'[1]

Shortly afterwards, In June, the Chancellor hit upon the idea of extending exemption from rates, previously limited to agriculture, to productive industry. This had been a vogue idea current for some time in industrial circles. The annual report of the Federation of British Industry for 1925-26 had advanced the case for relieving industry of the burden of rates, and The Times spoke in its favour in January 1927.

1 NC 18/1/568: Neville to Ida Chamberlain, 26 March 1927

In April 1928 The Spectator was to describe derating as 'a magic formula.'[1] Churchill wrote enthusiastically to Chamberlain, who commented gloomily in his diary:

> 'The trouble now is that Winston has again gone off the deep end and is in full cry after a new and I fear fantastic plan for distributing 30 millions of taxation among ratepayers.'[2]

He replied cautiously to the Chancellor, no doubt hoping that the latter's scheme would dissipate during the summer recess.

Churchill's letter of 18 October 1927 in which he outlined his thinking must have come to its recipient as a bolt from the blue. Churchill wrote:

> 'A large relief of the rates upon producers (agriculture and manufacturing) constitutes the main objective of the Finance of next year .... I see no reason why your plans and mine should not be interwoven ..... Joint action is indispensable for success. But you really must not expect me to produce 3 or 4 millions a year for a political scheme of modest dimensions that would only hurt the Finances without helping the government.'[3]

1 H J Bush Local, Intellectual and Policy Responses to Localised Unemployment in the Inter-War Period: the Genesis of Regional Policy (D. Phil, Oxford, 1980), p. 64

2 NC 2/22: Diary 1926-33, entry dated 16 June (1927)

3 NC 7/9/12: Churchill to Chamberlain, 18 October 1927

Chamberlain's immediate response was to hope that Churchill's advisers would counsel against extending derating to industry. He had heard, he wrote to Ida, from 'a certain Treasury official' that the Chancellor's scheme was not thought to be financially water-tight and that it would be suggested to him that it be abandoned.[1]

Churchill explained the impetus behind his plans in a dramatic memorandum circulated to members of the Cabinet in December.

> 'The long successes of Liberalism in the 19th century in the political and economic sphere were due to the fact that their policy consisted mainly in striking off outworn fetters on the enterprise and growing manhood of the nation. The relieving of the producers from their present oppression by antiquated laws constitutes almost the only remaining large task of liberation within reach of Governments these days.'[2]

The cost would be £48 million of which 50% would be found by imposing a new tax on imported liquid fuel.

1 NC 18/1/601: Neville to Ida Chamberlain, 17 December 1927

2 NC 7/9/15: Memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, 12 December 1927, para. 5

Churchill's language might have been designed to alienate the painstaking Minister of Health. Chamberlain's particular speciality, as we have seen, was the patient and detailed work of the dedicated bureaucrat. He took some delight at Churchill's inadequacies in this respect.

> 'It is comic to see how he flounders directly we get to the difficult details. His part is to brush broad splashes of paint with highlights and deep shadows. Accuracy of drawing is beyond his ken.'[1]

But Chamberlain's differences with Churchill over derating were not purely temperamental. First: he opposed the principle of state support for industry. He told his sister that the Chancellor's scheme was:

> 'So utterly illogical, so complicated, and so completely contradictory of the opinion universally expressed a little while ago that State subsidies were economically unsound that I could not imagine that it would not be torn to pieces at once.'[2]

Second: he believed strongly in the need to keep industry interested in local government, and the payment of rates would be the surest means of maintaining its involvement in local authority decisions.[3] Third: he was determined to

1 NC 1/26/384: Neville to Anne Chamberlain, 25 January 1928

2 NC 18/1/610: Neville to Hilda Chamberlain, 29 April 1928

3 NC 2/22: Diary 1926-33, entry dated 4 April (1928)

protect his department's 1921 plan for the reform of the Poor Law. In March 1928, he recorded that he had told Baldwin that:

> 'I had had an unhappy week facing up to resignation and I was determined to go rather than assent to a scheme which I believed to be dangerous to the future of local government.'[1]

For these three reasons Chamberlain was horrified by the prospect of derating. He confided to his diary that on one occasion:

> 'I protested and said (that Churchill) must not say "our" (rating plan). I hadn't even seen the scheme. Since then I have seen the general lines and it fills me with horror ....'[2]

Churchill understood none of Chamberlain's complaints nor could he comprehend his colleague's apparent lack of enthusiasm for the derating proposal. Matters came to a head in March 1928. The Chancellor wrote plaintively to the Minister of Health:

> 'I have felt extremely lonely in the shafts. Without your active aid, not merely acquiescence, I am sure I cannot drag the cart up the hill - nor shall I try.'[3]

1 NC 2/22: Diary 1926-33, entry dated 28 March (1928)

2 NC 2/22: Diary 1926-33, entry dated 9 December (1927)

3 NC 7/9/22: Churchill to Chamberlain, 13 March 1928

Chamberlain's reply was a milder version of the appropriate diary entry.[1] To Churchill he observed:

> 'I had a scheme which I believed would reform the Poor Law and deal with necessitous areas. I could have carried it with your help but you were not satisfied unless you could have something much bigger and incidentally much more difficult from the point of view of Local Government.'[2]

There was thus an impasse. Chamberlain had no chance of securing his department's reforms without the Chancellor's support, and the latter was unwilling to give it unless the Minister of Health agreed to his derating proposals. The Cabinet divided evenly between the two.

Baldwin held the balance for he would do nothing to offend either minister. Eventually the need to settle the parliamentary timeable for the 1928-29 session promoted compromise. Chamberlain secured his reforms of local administration and finance for the price of having hitched onto them the Chancellor's extension of derating and freight transport. At the Party Conference at Yarmouth in September, Chamberlain declared:

> 'This great policy of the government is one of rating relief and of local

1 NC 2/22: Diary 1026-33, entry dated 21 March (1928)

2 NC 7/9/23: Chamberlain to Churchill, 14 March 1928

> government reform, and the two are inextricably bound together.'[1]

The details of the concession made by Churchill and by Chamberlain need not concern us: they are technical, and this chapter has not been an exegesis of the 1929 Act. Suffice it to say that they were made because without them neither minister would have obtained even a fraction of their schemes. Chamberlain needed Churchill's support to persuade the Cabinet to give him the parliamentary time necessary to introduce his local government reforms; and Churchill, having strayed into a subject which was one of the Ministry of Health's responsibilities, depended upon the expertise of the Minister and his officials to draft the legislation required. The consequent intertwining of derating with the Ministry of Health's 1921 plan made little administrative sense from the point of view of either of the two departments principally concerned; but it was a party political necessity.

1 Conservative Party Archives, Bodleian Library: Conservative Rating Reform - the scheme explained by the Rt Hon Neville Chamberlain MP at the Conservative Party Conference, Yarmouth, 27 Septermber 1928

4. CONCLUSION

The 1929 Act has had a mixed reception from historians and from other commentators. To those of the 'missed opportunities' school of interpretation, it is a grievous disappointment. Robson thought that it 'scarcely touched the main problems of our time.'[1] Schulz saw it as marking:

> 'The end of an epoch rather than the beginning of a new period of stability. (It was) an administrative tidying up which left the main problems of the relatons of area to function in local authorities unresolved.'[2]

Newcomer argued that 'the derating which was the principal reason for the (act) would seem to be its least defensible achievement.'[3] There was no justification, she added, in shifting the burden of providing local authorities with adequate revenue from agriculture and industrial ratepayers to national taxpayers.

Sidney Webb, on the other hand, appreciated the act for its partial justification of his and his wife's efforts on the

1 W A Robson The Development of Local Government (London, 1931), p. 12

2 Schulz in Wilson (ed.) op. cit., p. 68

3 Newcomer op. cit., p. 206

Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress over twenty years before. He concluded in a Fabian Tract that:

> '(It) offers almost endless scope to progressive Councils, and every intelligent Councillor should press for the fullest use of the new powers.'[1]

The most recent commentary noted that the 1929 Act's block grants represented 'the first actual attempt to distribute grant according to a formula incorporating some criteria of needs and resources.'[2] What significance can we attribute to it?

The first point to make is that it is exceedingly difficult to assess the act's significance. The distorting impact of the 1930s depression makes it impossible to estimate the effect the act actually had as the conditions for which it was designed were challenged out of all recognition in little over two years. We are therefore restricted to an examination of the bill's potential, not of the act's results. Our discussion of the act has concentrated on those clauses which caused the greatest Cabinet controversies: namely, the introduction of block grants and the extension of derating from agriculture to industry. How important were these?

1 Sidney Webb The Local Government Act, 1929 (London, 1929), p. 15

2 Foster et al. op. cit., p. 184

The economic consequences to industry of rate relief are obscure, not least for the reasons given in the foregoing paragraph. All the available evidence suggests that they are unlikely to have been great. A government enquiry, whose report was published in the year that the bill received the royal assent, concluded that the contribution of rates to total industrial costs was of the order of 1%.[1] One Treasury official believed that the importance of derating lay in its psychological effect. Hurst observed:

> "My own view has always been that the main advantage to industry from derating will be psychological. It removes a handicap, which though small is made much of, and it gives industry a feeling of much greater security against large increases of local burdens."[2]

This suggests that Chamberlain had some justification for his objection to derating, ironically not on the political grounds he employed but on economic ones.

So far as block grants are concerned, it must be stressed that the greater part of local authority expenditure remained on the old basis and was quite unaltered by the act. Education, police, and housing were three services that

1 Final Report of the Committee on Industry and Trade Cmd. 3282 (1929), p. 254

2 Bush op. cit., p. 48

continued outside the new block grant system. Statistics do not exist that allow us even to hazard a guess as to the grants' impact on the services to which they applied, on the recipient local authorities, and on the government departments administering their application.

Churchill and Chamberlain had nevertheless established two crucial points of principle. After 1929 the Treasury was in a position to determine the extent of local authority spending in advance of the authorities' incurring it. The Ministry of Health realised through the act its long-term ambition of establishing a system of grant distribution that had some regard to the needs of the communities receiving the subventions involved.

The Treasury had thus gained the financial partner to the political principle of ultra vires. Whatever short-term advantages block grants brought to local authorities by way of a diminution of central government supervision of the minutiae of their spending was balanced by their greater dependence on Exchequer subventions in the long-term. The introduction of block grants left untouched the enduring problem of the inexpandibility of local authorities' fiscal bases. Thereafter the progressive nationalising of local government services was inevitable as long as politicans persisted in ignoring or in not daring to tackle it.

To conclude: the 1929 Act was significant in two senses. First: through its 'administrative tidying up,' by which is meant its enhancement of the importance of county and county borough councils; and second: by introducing block grants on a needs basis, thereby meeting both the requirements of the Treasury and of the Ministry of Health.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has traversed much ground, some of it in considerable detail and some of it at a distance. Its content may be divided roughly into three parts. The first part deals with the administrative antecedents of the Ministry of Health: the Local Government Board and the National Health Insurance Commission. It described and accounted for changes in the new department's organisation and in the attitudes of its officials. The third chapter, making up the second part, examined Neville Chamberlain's record as Minister of Health between 1924 and 1929. The final part, comprised of the last two chapters, considered some aspects of the work of the Ministry's local government division, and of the drafting of the Local Government Act of 1929.

In one sense these three parts stand separately, entire in themselves. The first is essentially a work of administrative history. It discussed the origins of two government departments and assessed the esprit de corps of their officials. It showed the degree to which one view of administration, embodied by Sir Robert Morant, was far from being fully accepted; and it demonstrated the contrasting approach of his successor, Sir Arthur Robinson. This shed light on the differences and tension between passive and

active versions of the role of the civil service.

The second part is more purely a piece of political biography. If a claim to originality must be made, it is in this third chapter that it is most likely to be justified. Chamberlain's record in domestic politics has not been properly assessed hitherto for his political career has been overshadowed by its termination in a brief and controversial premiership. This chapter showed the extent to which his early life and experience well suited him for his time at the Ministry of Health.

The final part was concerned to set the Local Government Act of 1929 in its proper perspective. It has been argued that only in its narrowest sense could the act's extension of derating to industry be said to be the principal reason for the government giving the measure parliamentary time. Without derating, there would in all probability have been a reform of the Poor Law and of various local government activities. It is unlikely that it would have been as significant a piece of legislation as the 1929 Act, for the Cabinet's lack of enthusiasm and the Chancellor's hostility to Chamberlain's proposals stood in the latter's way. Nevertheless the act was much more than 'an administraive tidying up:' it set new standards of needs assessment, pursued diligently and increasingly incomprehensibly by successive governments.

Although these three parts are self-contained units, they are at the same time inter-related. Each has been written with the machinery of government and the civil servants operating it prominently in the foreground. Political historians too often ignore the government machine that implements the policies for which ministers usually receive the entire responsibility, whether it be opprobious or to their credit. On the other hand it is far too crude to describe the relationship between ministers and their officials, as ex-ministers are wont to do, as one of the habitual dominance of political heads of departments of state by their formally inferior advisors. Our study of the Ministry of Health during Chamberlain's second tenure of office has shown, if it has shown nothing else, some of the subtlety that can exist in the relations between civil servants and ministers. The administrative culture acts as a restraint and a stimulus; and it is both a tool of historical analysis and a subject in its own right.

How influential is the civil service? It is a question often posed and as often tritely answered. This thesis has offered no clear answer, except that clear answers do not emerge from meticulous examinations of the personalities and work practices of the civil servants of this department. We have followed changes in officials' views of administration, but the political or policy consequences - if any - do not stand

out. On the other hand, the thesis has broken new ground inpresenting a convincing account of the gradual evolution of policy over a timespan longer than that of the life of a government. In so doing, it has shown something of the work and the influence of those behind the actors on the political stage.

APPENDICES

1. Ministers of Health, 1919-40

2. Principal Officials of the Ministry of Health, 1919-40

3. Biographies of Selected Senior Officials of the Ministry of Health, 1919-40

4. Hierarchy and Salary Scales in the Ministry of Health, 1919-40

APPENDIX 1
MINISTERS OF HEALTH, 1919-40

Dr Christopher Addison (Liberal)	June 1919 - April 1921 [1]
Sir Alfred Mond (Liberal)	April 1921 - October 1922
Sir Arthur Griffith-Boscawen (Unionist)	October 1922 - March 1923
Neville Chamberlain (Unionist)	March - August 1923
Sir William Joynson-Hicks (Conservative)	August 1923 - January 1924
John Wheatley (Labour)	January - November 1924
Neville Chamberlain (Unionist)	November 1924 - June 1929
Arthur Greenwood (Labour)	June 1929 - August 1931
Neville Chamberlain (Unionist)	August - November 1931
Sir Edward Hilton Young (Conservative)	November 1931 - June 1935
Sir Kingsley Wood (Conservative)	June 1935 - May 1938
Walter Elliot (Unionist)	May 1938 - May 1940
Malcolm MacDonald (National Labour)	May 1940 (- February 1941) [2]

1 Dr Addison was appointed President of the Local Government Board in January 1919 in preparation for the creation of the Ministry of Health.

2 MacDonald was not a member of the War Cabinet. Each one of his predecessors held cabinet rank, as did his successors until 1952. In 1968 the Minister of Health became a minister of state in the new Department of Health and Social Security.

APPENDIX 2

PRINCIPAL OFFICIALS OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH, 1919-40

Secretary[1]	Sir Robert Morant, 1919-20
	Sir Arthur Robinson, 1920-35
	Sir George Chrystal, 1935-40
	Sir John Maude, 1940(-45)
Deputy Secretary	Sir John Anderson, 1919
	Sir Aubrey Symonds, 1919-25
	Sir Edward Forber, 1925-30
	Sir Ernest Strohmenger, 1930-32
	Sir Arthur Lowry, 1932-34
	Sir John Maude, 1934-40
Chief Medical Officer	Sir George Newman, 1919-35
	Sir Arthur MacNalty, 1935-41
	Sir William Jameson, 1941-50
Accountant-General	Sir Henry Bunbury, 1919
	Sir Ernest Strohmenger, 1920-30
	S H G Hughes, 1930-40

1 Until 1925 the secretary and the deputy secretary were designated First Secretary and Second Secretary. The titles Accountant-General, Director of Establishments, and Principal Assistant Secretary first appear in His Majesty's Ministers and Heads of Public Departments in 1920 though the functions date from the department's creation.

Director of Establishments	Sir Alfred Woodgate, 1920-24 H A Leggett, 1924-37 A N Rucker, 1937-39 E D Macgregor, 1939(-47)
Principal Assistant Secretaries	Sir Frederick Willis, 1920-21 Sir Ernest Strohmenger, 1920-30 Sir Sylvanus Vivian, 1921(-45) Sir Edward Forber, 1921-25 Sir Laurence Brock, 1925-28 Sir Gwilym Gibbon, 1925-36 A B Maclachlan, 1928-37 H W S Francis, 1929-38 S H G Hughes, 1930-39 J C Wrigley, 1935 R B Cross, 1935 H A de Montmorency, 1938 A W Neville, 1938 T H Sheepshanks, 1939 H H George, 1939
Private Secretary to the Minister [2]	Douglas Veale, 1921-28 A Nevil Rucker, 1928-36 S F S Hearder, 1936-39 S F Wilkinson, 1939

2 Douglas Veale, who was knighted in 1954 shortly before retirement from 'approved service' as Registrar of Oxford University, had previously been private secretary to the First Secretary. Nevil Rucker (Sir Arthur from 1942) had been the Minister's assistant private secretary from 1923 until 1925, and from 1927 until he succeeded Veale in the following year.

APPENDIX 3

BIOGRAPHIES OF SELECTED SENIOR OFFICIALS OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH, 1919-40 [1]

ANDERSON, Sir John, Viscount Waverley, 1882-1958

Educated at George Watson's Academy, Edinburgh, and Edinburgh and Leipzig Universities.

1905	second class clerk, Colonial Office
1912	principal clerk and secretary, National Health Insurance Commission for England
1917	secretary, Ministry of Shipping
1919	(March) additional secretary, Local Government Board
1919	(July) Second Secretary, Ministry of Health
1919	(October) chairman, Board of Inland Revenue

Subsequently permanent under-secretary of state, Home Office (1922-32) and Chancellor of the Exchequer (1943-45).

ARMER, Sir (Isaac) Frederick, born 1891

Educated at a secondary school in Cardiff and the University College of South Wales and Monmouth.

1919	assistant principal, Ministry of Health
1929	principal
1936	assistant secretary
1940	chairman, Welsh Board of Health

1 These biographies were compiled from information drawn principally from the following sources: The British Imperial Calendar and Civil Service List; Civil Service List; Dictionary of National Biography; PRO, MH 78/18; PRO, MH 107/1-45; The Times; and Who's Who. Diligent enquiry revealed no collections of significant private papers for any of the officials mentioned in this appendix. Dates are accurate only to within twelve months.

BROCK, Sir Laurence George, 1879-1949

Educated at Dulwich College and Corpus Christi College, Oxford.

1903	Admiralty
1912	assistant secretary, National Health Insurance Commission for England
1919	assistant secretary, Ministry of Health
1925	principal assistant secretary
1928	chairman, Board of Control

FORBER, Sir Edward Rodolph, 1878-1960

Educated at Liverpool College, University College, Liverpool, and Trinity College, Cambridge.

1900	Local Government Board
1919	assistant secretary, Ministry of Health
1921	principal assistant secretary
1925	deputy secretary
1930	chairman, Board of Customs and Excise
1934	chairman, Board of Inland Revenue
1938	retired from the Civil Service.

FRANCIS, H W S, 1880-1968

Educated at Blundell's School and Balliol College, Oxford.

1903	second and first class clerk, Local Government Board
1919	assistant secretary, Ministry of Health
1929	principal assistant secretary
1939	Secretary and Comptroller General, National Debt Office

GEORGE, H H, 1890-1982

Educated at Westminster City School and Trinity College, Oxford.

1913	second class clerk, Local Government Board
1919	assistant principal, Ministry of Health
1924	principal
1936	assistant secretary
1939	principal assistant secretary

GIBBON, Sir (Ioan) Gwilym, 1874-1948

Eduated at Oswestry High School and the London School of Economics (BA, DSc).

1894	second division clerk, Savings Bank Department
1898	secretary's office, General Post Office
1903	higher division clerk, Local Government Board
1919	assistant secretary, Ministry of Health
1925	principal assistant secretary
1936	retired from the Civil Service

Prolific author of articles in Public Administration and elsewhere, Dr Gibbon was for a while the honorary research director of the Royal Institute of Public Administration. He published many books and monographs amongst which were:

Report on Existing Schools for Mothers, 1910

A Study of Schemes of Assisted Insurance, 1911

Medical Benefit in Germany and Denmark, 1912

Infant Welfare Centres, 1913

Mothers' Pensions in the United States of America, 1918

Infant Welfare in Germany during the War, 1918

The Welfare of Children of Women Employed in Factories in France and Germany, 1919

The Housing Problem in Germany, 1919

National Parks, 1931

The Expenditure and Revenue of Local Authorities, 1934

The Public Social Services, 1937

The Problems of Town and County Planning, 1937

The History of the London County Council (with Reginald W Bell), 1939

Reconstruction and Town and Country Planning, 1942

HACKFORTH, Edgar, 1878-1952

Educated at Westminster and Trinity College, Cambridge.

1902	junior inspector, Board of Education
1903	junior examiner
1906	resigned from the Civil Service (secretary, Brighton Education Committee)
1912	principal, National Health Insurance Commission for England
1919	Deputy Controller of Insurance, Ministry of Health
1937	Controller

Contributed the entry 'National Insurance: Health' for the Encyclopedia Britannica, (14th ed., London, 1929).

HARRIS, R W, born 1874

Educated at secondary school.

1890	second division clerk, Army Clothing Department
1892	second class clerk, India Office
1894	assistant surveyor of taxes, Board of Inland Revenue
1912	National Health Insurance Commission for England
1919	assistant secretary, Ministry of Health
1922	resigned from the Civil Service

Contributor to Punch and author of How Do I Stand? (London, 1942), Medical Insurance Practice (with Leonard Shoetensack,) (London, 1922), Not So Humdrum, (London, 1939), National Health Insurance in Great Britain, (London, 1946), A Short Guide to Income Tax ... for the use of the clergy of the Church of England, (London, 1949).

HESELTINE, Michael, 1886-1952

Educated at Winchester and New College, Oxford.

1909	second class clerk, Office of Works
1911	junior clerk, Home Office
1919	secretary to consultative councils, Ministry of Health
1924	assistant director of establishments
1928	assistant secretary
1933	resigned from the Civil Service (1933 Registrar, General Medical Council and General Dental Council)

KINNEAR, Sir Walter Samuel, 1872-1953

Educated at University College, Dublin.

1912	deputy chairman, National Health Insurance Commission for Ireland
1919	controller of insurance, Ministry of Health
1936	retired from the Civil Service

MacNALTY, Sir Arthur Salusbury, 1880-1969

Educated privately, at St Catherine's and Corpus Christi Colleges, Oxford, and at University College Hospital, London.

1913	medical inspector, Local Government Board
1919	medical officer and senior medical officer, Ministry of Health
1935	chief medical officer, Ministry of Health
1941	retired from Civil Service

Author of works of medical history and biography, for example: Henry VIII, (London, 1952) and, as editor, Civilian Health and Medical Services, (2 vols., London, 1953, 1954).

MORANT, Sir Robert Laurie, 1863-1920

Educated at Winchester and New College, Oxford.

(1886 tutor in the court of Chulalongkorn, King of Siam
1894 censor of studies, Toynbee Hall, Whitechapel)

1895	assistant director of special enquiries and reports, Education Department
1902	acting secretary, Board of Education
1903	secretary
1911	vice-chairman, National Health Insurance Commission for England
1919	First Secretary, Ministry of Health
1920	(March) died of pleurisy

NEWMAN, Sir George, 1870-1948

Educated at Edinburgh University.

1907	chief medical officer, Board of Education
1912	principal assistant secretary and chief medical officer, Board of Education
1919	(January) chief medical officer, Local Government Board and Board of Education
1919	chief medical officer, Ministry of Health and Board of Education
1935	retired from the Civil Service

Prominent Quaker and long serving anonymous editor of the Society of Friends' Quarterly Examiner, Newman was a persistent proselytiser, publishing amongst other monographs and books:

An Outline of the Practice of Preventive Medicine (1919, 1926)

Public Opinion in Preventive Medicine (1920)

The Private Practitioner as Pioneer in Preventive Medicine (1926)

The Foundations of National Health (1928)

Health and Social Evolution (1931)

The Rise of Preventive Medicine (1932)

The Building of a Nation's Health (1939)

ROBINSON, Sir (William) Arthur, 1874-1950

Educated at Appleby School and The Queen's College, Oxford.

1897	first place in the Civil Service Examination
	second and first class clerk, Colonial Office
1912	assistant secretary, Office of Works
1917	secretary, Air Ministry
1920	First Secretary, Ministry of Health
1935	chairman, Supply Board
1939	secretary, Ministry of Supply
1940	retired from the Civil Service

ROSS, W A, born ? 1877

Educated at Balliol College, Oxford.

1900	administrative clerk, Local Government Board
1905	senior class clerk
1914	first class clerk
1919	principal, Ministry of Health
1930	assistant secretary
1937	retired from the Civil Service

Author of articles in Public Administration.

RUCKER, Sir Arthur Nevil, born 1895

Educated at Marlborough and Trinity College, Cambridge.

1919	assistant principal, Ministry of Health
1930	principal
1936	assistant secretary
1937	director of establishments and public relations
1939	principal private secretary to the Prime Minister
1940	deputy secretary, Ministry of Health

RUSSELL-SMITH, Dame Enid Mary Russell, born 1903

Educated at St Felix School, Southwold, Suffolk and Newnham College, Cambridge.

1925	assistant principal, Ministry of Health
1934	principal
1939	assistant secretary

Author of Modern Bureaucracy: the Home Civil Service (London, 1974).

SHARP, Dame Evelyn, Baroness Sharp of Hornsey, born 1903

Educated at St Paul's Girls' School and Somerville College, Oxford.

1926	assistant principal, Board of Trade
1927	assistant principal, Ministry of Health
1934	principal
1939	assistant secretary

Ultimately permanent secretary, Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 1955-66, and author of its history (1968).

STROHMENGER, Sir Ernest John, 1873-1967

Educated at secondary school.

1893	second division clerk, Local Government Board
1894	surveyor of taxes, Board of Inland Revenue
1913	deputy controller, National Health Insurance Commission for England
1917	deputy accountant-general, Ministry of Shipping
1920	accountant-general, Ministry of Health
1930	deputy secretary
1932	under secretary, Treasury
1934	Deputy Chairman, Unemployment Assistance Board
1937	retired from the Civil Service

SYMONDS, Sir Aubrey Vere, 1874-1931

Educated at Bedford School and University College, Oxford.

1897	second class clerk, Local Government Board
1910	first class clerk
1914	assistant secretary (loaned to National Health Insurance Commission for England)
1919	assistant secretary, Ministry of Health (October) Second Secretary
1925	secretary, Board of Education
1931	(March) died of pleurisy

VEALE, Sir Douglas, 1891-1973

Educated at Bristol Grammar School and Corpus Christi College, Oxford.

1914	second class clerk, Local Government Board
1919	assistant principal, Ministry of Health
1926	principal
1930	Registrar, University of Oxford on 'approved service' as a civil servant

VIVIAN, Sir Sylvanus Percival, 1880-1948

Educated at St Paul's and St John's College, Oxford.

1903	Board of Inland Revenue
1913	assistant secretary, National Health Insurance Commission for England
1917	seconded to the Ministry of Food and to the Ministry of Shipping
1919	assistant secretary, Ministry of Health and Deputy Registrar-General
1921	principal assistant secretary, Ministry of Health and Registrar-General

Contributor to Public Administration and author of literary and antiquarian works.

WILLIS, Sir Frederick James 1863-1946

Educated at Merchant Venturers School, Bristol, University College, Clifton and the Middle Temple.

	Local Government Board
1920	principal assistant secretary, Ministry of Health
1921	chairman, Board of Control
1928	retired from the Civil Service

APPENDIX 4

HIERARCHY AND SALARY SCALES IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH, 1919-40

Hierarchy

Officials of the interwar civil service were divided horizontally into two classes: the administrative, corresponding to the pre-1919 first division; and the executive, previously the second division. It has been calculated that in 1939 the former category was made up of 1,434 officials, and that this number comprised roughly 1% of the total of those employed in the civil service other than in the industrial, manipulative, messengerial, and technical grades.[1] This thesis is concerned principally with the administrative class; or, more precisely, with its elite which has been described by Dale as 'the Higher Civil Service.'[2] The members of this elite are those of the administrative class whose work comes before the minister himself and who enjoy 'personal contact with the Parliamentary chiefs of the Department.'[3] In the Ministry of Health of this period it was composed of the permanent secretary, the deputy secretary, the accountant-general, the chief medical officer, the principal

1 H E Dale The Higher Civil Service of Great Britain (Oxford, 1941), pp. 3-4; 205

2 ibid., p. 2

3 loc. cit.

assistant secretaries and some of their subordinates; and, in a different capacity, the minister's private secretaries.[1]

The administrative class of the Ministry of Health and of other government departments was divided into six grades. In the Ministry, though not in departments whose political heads were secretaries of state, their titles were as follows: secretary, deputy secretary, principal assistant secretary, assistant secretary, principal, and assistant principal.

A graduate entrant to the civil service would receive appointment as an assistant principal. Though this was regarded essentially as a training grade, the slowness of promotion during the interwar period prevented most appointments to principal being made within even a decade of recruitment.

In the Ministry of Health principals were usually in charge of branches comprehending distinct and coherent responsibilities; and the branches were in turn grouped into divisions, each under the direction of an assistant secretary. The principal assistant secretaries supervised and co-ordinated the activities of the divisions, though the deputy secretary also had responsibility for a particular segment of departmental work: Sir Aubrey Symonds, for example, dealt with local government matters.

1 Some qualification of this statement is necessary. The chief medical officer is not known to have exercised his right of independent access to the minister between 1919 and 1935; and most of their correspondence, if not the whole of it, passed through the hands of the permanent secretary. The statement refers to the formal relationships: in this instance it does not describe the actual practice.

So much for what Dale has called 'the pleasing symmetry of the pyramidal structure.'[1] How this structure functioned is the subject of discussion in other parts of the thesis.[2]

Salary Scales

'Salary is the true criterion' in assessing rank and ascribing status in the civil service.[3] It is one of the few yardsticks that knows no barriers of grade or responsibility; and the concentration of technical officials' criticisms on salaries, increments, and bonuses indicates their sensitivity to this point.[4]

Rates of remuneration for members of the administrative class did not vary significantly during the 1920s and 1930s. In 1925 a male principal received a salary on a scale ranging from £700 to £900. On the outbreak of the Second World War, his scale was £800 to £1100 and a female principal's £700 to £940. There were allowances of various kinds for the lucky few who became private secretaries to the department's senior political and permanent staff. Veale, for example, drew an additional £300 p.a. in 1925 whilst he was Neville Chamberlain's private secretary. In 1939 his successor, Hearder, received only £150 p.a. in his capacity as private secretary to Walter Elliot for by then the Treasury had squeezed the secretarial allowances made to ministers. These sums were attached to the appointment and not to the individual occupying it, and thus were lost when the recipient moved to another post.

1 Dale op. cit., p. 6

2 See above, chapter two, sections three and five

3 Dale op. cit., p. 205

4 See above, chapter two, section four

By comparison, the permanent secretary and the minister of a first class department of state had salaries of £3000 and £5000 respectively for most of the interwar period.[1]

It may seem surprising at first sight that there were few serious complaints from civil servants about salary scales. In fact the criticisms they made were less about pay than about conditions. They complained about the slowness of promotion; but, having accepted that there was little prospect of accelerating ascents through the hierarchy, their dissatisfactions were chiefly with the uninterest of senior civil servants in making their junior colleagues' work more attractive. They objected to the absence of training, except on the job; and to the infrequency of intra- and inter-departmental exchanges. Some advocated the setting up of a civil service college and the granting of sabbatical years, for example at the ages of thirty and forty-five.[2] These issues are examined elsewhere.[3]

Virtually unmoving rates of remuneration did not generate dissent partly because of the relative attractions of a civil service appointment and partly because of the gradual increase in the purchasing power of the pound.[4] On the basis of being worth 20/- in 1900, the pound's purchasing power had declined to 7/- in 1920.

1 Salaries are given in The British Imperial List and Civil Service Calendar

2 The last point is forcefully made by H E Dale The Personnel and Problems of the Higher Civil Service (Oxford, 1943)

3 See above, chapter two, section four

4 Naturally rates of remuneration were discussed extensively when the occasion demanded: see, for example, Royal Commission on the Civil Service 1929-31, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix viii, Statement Submitted by the Association of First Division Civil Servants, part iii. 5

Thereafter its value rose slowly, reaching a peak of 12/5 in 1933 before declining to 8/11 in 1940.[1] Salary scales in the civil service, as in the professional middle class as a whole, thus disguise a gentle improvement in their values for the greater part of the interwar period.[2]

1 David Butler and Anne Sloman British Political Facts 1900-1975 (4th ed., London, 1975), p. 306

2 J Burnett A History of the Cost of Living (Harmondsworth, 1969)

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A. Manuscript Sources

B. Interviews and Correspondence

C. Official Publications

D. Public Records

E. Bibliographies and Works of Reference

F. Newspapers and Periodicals

G. Books and Articles

H. Theses and Dissertations

A. MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

Birmingham University Library	Neville Chamberlain Papers
Bodleian Library	Addison Papers Sanders Diary
Cambridge University Library	Baldwin Papers
Department of Health and Social Security, Alexander Fleming House, London	Newman Daybooks
India Office Library and Records	Meston Papers

I have also examined the following collections which yielded little or nothing of value for this thesis:

Bodleian Library	Conservative Party Archives Arthur Greenwood Papers Sadler Papers Simon Papers Worthington-Evans Papers
British Library of Political and Economic Science	British Oral Archive of Political and Administrative History
Cambridge University Library	Kennet Papers
Hereford and Worcester County Record Office, Hereford	Newman Papers
Hull University Library	Socialist Medical Association Papers
In private possession	Melchett Papers Russell-Smith Papers Veale Papers
Kent University Library	Wood Papers
Royal College of Physicians, London	Newsholme Papers
Royal College of Surgeons, London	Moynihan Papers
Surrey County Record Office, Guildford	Onslow Papers

B. INTERVIEWS AND CORRESPONDENCE WITH FORMER OFFICIALS OF THE INTERWAR MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND THEIR CHILDREN, AND OTHERS

Interviews

Sir Arthur Rucker on 20 May 1979 and 28 August 1981
Dame Enid Russell-Smith on 15 April 1980
Baroness Sharp of Hornsey on 3 July 1980

C A P Hackforth, a son of Edgar Hackforth, on 15 July 1980
J D L Veale, the son of Sir Douglas Veale, on 22 February 1984

Sir Patrick Nairne, permanent secretary of the Department of Health and Social Security 1975-81, on 1 June 1982

Sir Douglas Veale, interviewed on 14 January 1969, and Sir Arthur Rucker, interviewed on 19 May 1969, by Dr B H Harrison, Corpus Christi College, Oxford (tape-recording in the possession of the interviewer)

Correspondence

Sir Frederick Armer
M G Brock, a son of Sir Laurence Brock
Sir Martin Flett *
H H George
Sir Antony Part *
P Strohmenger, the son of Sir Ernest Strohmenger
H I Willis, a son of Sir Frederick Willis

* Both Sir Martin Flett and Sir Antony Part were very junior colleagues of Sir Arthur Robinson when the latter was permanent head of the Board - subsequently the Ministry - of Supply.

C. OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS

1. Command Papers

i Annual

Annual Reports of the Ministry of Health:

First (1919-20)	i	Cmd. 923: Parl. Papers 1920, xvii. 49
	ii	Cmd. 917: Parl. Papers 1920, xvii. 227
	iii	Cmd. 932: Parl. Papers 1920, xvii. 283
	iv	Cmd. 913: Parl. Papers 1920, xvii. 447
Second (1920-21)		Cmd. 1446: Parl. Papers 1921, xiii. 1
Third (1921-22)		Cmd. 1713: Parl. Papers 1922, viii. 1
Fourth (1922-23)		Cmd. 1944: Parl. Papers 1923, xi. 593
Fifth (1923-24)		Cmd. 2218: Parl. Papers 1924, ix. 751
Sixth (1924-25)		Cmd. 2450: Parl. Papers 1924-25, xiii. 311
Seventh (1925-26)		Cmd. 2724: Parl. Papers 1926, xi. 1
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Ninth (1927-28)		Cmd. 3185: Parl. Papers 1928-29, vi. 597
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