STRATHCLYDE PAPERS ON GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

HOW ADOLF HITLER REFORMED WHITEHALL

Peter Hennessy
and
Sir Douglas Hague

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Caption: 569, Chiswick High Road, West London, site of the most successful personnel operation ever mounted by Whitehall.

Pictures of Lord Franks and Lord Penney courtesy of THE TIMES.
Photograph of 569 Chiswick High Road. David Thorpe.

FOR OUR FRIENDS
JOHN HOSKYNS AND
NORMAN STRAUSS,
ARCH EXPONENTS OF
THE NEW BLOOD
THEORY

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INTRODUCTION

> 'Wars are like weddings: essentially extravagant and unnecessary but a great stimulant in a convention-bound society'.
>
> Professor Arthur Marwick, 1967. (1)

As convention-bound societies go, the British Civil Service is in the top flight. It does not lack intellect or curiosity. From the 1870s until very recently it attracted a substantial slice of the best, young, university-trained brainpower - generation after generation - into its senior ranks. But its very continuity, its heavy reliance on precedent, its devotion to the rulebook make it a classic example of Mancur Olson's 'institutional sclerosis'.(2) Aristocracies of talent are far harder to reform than aristocracies of birth.

It can be argued that the last person to truly reform Whitehall was that well known expert in public administration, Adolf Hitler. He obliged the British Government to find new men and new methods almost overnight. Compared with what had gone before and what came after, wartime Whitehall was a success story, a crucial factor in producing what became the most thoroughly mobilised society on either side, Allied or Axis, in World War II. (3) The mix of career regulars and outside irregulars blended between 1939 and 1945 represents the high point of achievement in the history of the British Civil Service.

How it was done is a fascinating story in itself. More important, it has lessons for the growing segment of the political nation which believes British ministers need a new instrument if the country is to be successfully governed as it passes from the twentieth to the twenty-first century. In a convention-bound society, the would-be reformer can win an advantage by saying 'I've seen the past and it works'. At a time when Whitehall's critics look to France, the United States or Japan for a model, this study suggests we have something to learn

from the day Whitehall threw open its doors to the capable and the innovative for the overriding purpose of beating Hitler.

PETER HENNESSY
DOUGLAS HAGUE

AUGUST 1985

THE PLAN

> 'The theory before the war started was that the UK wasn't going to make the same mistake as in the First World War when some of our most brilliant scientists went in and were shot almost immediately.'
>
> Lord Penney, 1985. (4)

The torrent of irregulars diverted from mainstream careers to help run Whitehall's war included a Cambridge scientist who was to become their house novelist. He was C.P. Snow and invented a name for the breed. He called them The New Men,(5) though Lewis Elliot, his earnest hero, the lawyer turned administrator of the British atomic bomb project, scarcely does justice to the glittering grands corps which grew up inside the shell of the traditional career Civil Service. Elliot found himself in what is clearly a fictional version of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research through 'some personal coincidences' not by virtue of his inclusion in the Whitehall head-hunting exercise which is the subject of this study:

> 'It was because the Minister knew me that I went into his department, and it was because of his own singular position that we saw the minutes of the scientific committees...by 1939 he had become such a link as all governments needed, particularly at the beginning of a war, before the forms of administration had settled down: they needed a man like Thomas Bevill as the chairman of confidential committees, the man to be kept informed of what was going on, the supreme post-office.
>
> 'Just before the war began, he asked me to join him as one of his personal assistants. He had met me two or

> three times with the Boscastles, which was a virtue in his eyes, and I had been trained as a lawyer, which was another. He thought I was suitable raw material to learn discretion. Gradually, in the first autumn of the war, he let me item by item into his confidential files'.(6)

Patronage of the Thomas Bevill type did find some of the real-life Whitehall irregulars though it was frowned on at the highest levels in the Treasury and the Ministry of Labour. (7) In fact, by the time Lewis Elliot was hearing from his Minister that 'some of these scientists believe they can present us with a great big bang'(8), Whitehall's planners had been working for over three years on the machinery of government and the people to man it should war come.

On March 18, 1936, eleven days after Hitler reoccupied the Rhineland, Sir Maurice Hankey, Secretary of the Cabinet and the Committee of Imperial Defence, wrote to Sir Warren Fisher, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury and Head of the Civil Service. He noted that 'we have learned so much from 1914-18 in respect of what our needs are likely to be for a major war, that it seems we should take advantage of that experience, in the comparatively quiet times of peace and do all we can in advance of another major emergency'.(9) Hankey sketched out a blueprint of the departments wartime Whitehall might throw up:

> Ministry of Food)thrown off by the Board
> Ministry of Shipping)of Trade
> Ministry of Supply
> Ministry of National Service
> Ministry of Blockade
> Ministry of Information
> Ministry (or Department) for the redistribution of Imports. (10)

Initially, the emphasis was on earmarking career officials in existing departments for possible transfer to new ministries, if war came, to form a core staff. It was quickly realised at an interdepartmental meeting in the Treasury chaired by Fisher on May 14, 1936 'that certain Departments such as the Board of Trade would have a large number of war-time offshoots and would probably find it impossible to provide all the necessary higher staff....it was explained that in certain provisional plans proposals existed for employing outside experts either as actual members of the staff of the war-time Department or on Advisory Committees connected therewith.' (11)

These 'provisional plans' would have turned up in the War Book, a huge tome kept and updated by the Committee of Imperial Defence since its foundation during the Edwardian arms race between Britain and Germany. The latest exercise, triggered by Hitler's rearmament programme, was given considerable bureaucratic status at the end of July 1936. A Treasury Minute, initialled by Fisher, Stanley Baldwin, the Prime Minister and Neville Chamberlain, Chancellor of the Exchequer put it on a formal footing and commissioned a Mobilisation (Civil Departments) Committee.(12) Progress was desultory, however, despite the interest of Hankey and Fisher, neither of whom was in the appeasement camp. There was bureaucratic overlap between Fisher's committee and a sub-group of the CID, its Manpower Sub-Committee, chaired by Sir William Graham Greene. Greene was an old Whitehall warhorse who had been Secretary to the Admiralty and Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Munitions during the Kaiser's war. He was brought out of retirement to produce, among other things, a report on the 'Employment in War of University Men'. (13) He sat in the summer of 1938 with selected good and great from the scholarly community. They included the famous anti-appeasement candidate in the Oxford by-election later that year, A.D. Lindsay, Master of Balliol, W.M. Spens of Corpus Christi, Cambridge, Sir Hector Hetherington of Glasgow, Sir

Franklin Sibley of Reading, Chairman of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, and Ifor Evans of Aberystwyth. The CVCP had its own group under Spens shadowing Greene.

Greene signed his report on August 31, 1938. It had two main recommendations:

> '(a) that undergraduates and graduates wishing to enlist should be treated primarily as a field for the election of officers or for employment on special duties and therefore dealt with under special recruiting arrangements.
>
> (b) that those of them who have special technical qualifications should not be used for ordinary combatant services but should be retained with a view to their employment on technical work either with the services, in Government Departments, or in industry'.(14)

The Greene report mentions 'the proposed central bureau' in the Ministry of Labour, the body dreamed up by the Treasury's man on the committee. When it finally materialised after Munich, this was to be the pipeline carrying the transfusion of new blood into wartime Whitehall. In the 'voluntary period' before hostilities occurred, wrote Greene, university appointments boards, when they came across a suitably qualified chap, 'should send full particulars of his qualifications, including separate assessments of his personality and ability, to the Ministry of Labour for the use of the proposed central bureau which will deal with vacancies in administrative and technical posts both civil and military and should inform the man that he will be advised later as to the best way in which his services can be utilised.' (15)

Whitehall's most secret organisation, which in the end was to

gather probably the greatest collection of first class British grey matter ever assembled in one place, did not wait for Greene or Spens or Munich. That organisation was the Government Code and Cypher School, precursor of today's Government Communications Headquarters. And the place was Bletchley Park, a mock-Gothic mansion in Buckinghamshire, 'War Station' of the GC and CS. Its head, Commander Alistair Denniston, planned meticulously. He drew up an 'emergency list' containing 'men of the Professor type.' (16) By early June 1938 he had even been in touch with the Women's Employment Federation to find, as the Federation's circular to university appointments boards put it, 'a small reserve of young women with good language qualifications who would be available, at need, for unestablished service' at a time of emergency. Those interested were invited to get in touch with 'Miss Moore at the Foreign Office' (17), (the GC & CS used the cover of 'Room 47, Foreign Office'). Within three months, a skeleton staff was sent in haste from Room 47 in Broadway Buildings - home of M16, the Secret Intelligence Service - to Bletchley.(18) The Czech crisis of September 1938 looked like the real thing. Trenches were dug in the London parks. Britain's 44 anti-aircraft guns were wheeled out. Thirty-eight million gas masks were distributed to regional centres. (19) Suddenly, Whitehall's planning for war ceased to be a leisurely affair.

MUNICH

> 'In September 1938 we all had a bit of paper from the Ministry of Labour which said "Do you undertake to go wherever you are sent in the event of a national emergency?"'
>
> Lord Franks, 1977 (20)

Munich put flesh on the bones laid down by the Greene Committee. What had been a three-and-a-half year paper exercise began to turn into people. Cards were despatched from one end of the kingdom to another to those whose professional background caused Whitehall to deem them potentially useful. HMD Parker, the official historian of manpower policy in World War II, is highly critical of the Whitehall headhunters before Munich:

> 'During the crisis weeks over half a million enrolled in the ARP [Air Raid Precautions] services, and from the professional and scientific world so many offers of help were received that the Ministry of Labour was obliged to set up a special department - the future Central Register - to record the names and qualifications of the applicants. Public opinion was thus forcing the government to more decisive action'. (21)

HMD Parker (not to be confused with Harold Parker, the Treasury's man on mobilisation policy in 1936-40) was a Lecturer in Roman History at Oxford who entered the Ministry of Labour as a temporary in 1941. He places the blame for the pre-Munich malaise squarely on the appeasement mentality of the Chamberlain administration:

> 'It was characteristic of the slowness or the unwillingness of the Government to accept the probability of war that virtually no steps were taken until the Munich crisis to ascertain the supply of suitable scientists, or, in the event of war to prevent their diversion to other forms of employment where their specialised knowledge would be wasted. On the other hand, to meet the inevitable expansion of bureaucracy that war would involve, some steps had to be taken to identify and safeguard professional men of administrative experience whose services might be a valuable asset to the Civil Service'. (22)

Those cards which popped through the letter boxes of the young Professor Oliver Franks in Glasgow and others in the university world would have come as a complete surprise. Until Munich, the vice-chancellors had been sworn to secrecy, a restriction they found irksome. In November 1938, Sir Franklin Sibley of the CVCP in a memorandum for Sir John Anderson, Lord Privy Seal and the Minister responsible for co-ordinating Civil Defence, said of the vice-chancellors:

> '...in September last they were greatly hampered by the obligation of secrecy imposed by nearly every communication received by them from a variety of Government departments. It is impossible for the Head of a University to make necessary arrangements without consulting a number of his colleagues. It is also impossible to prevent members of the staff and students at a time of crisis from leaving the University and finding some sort of national service unless they can be told in advance what the Government desires them to do'. (23)

Munich, it seems, energised the university establishment as much as it did Whitehall's. In October H.H. Wiles, the Assistant Secretary in charge of the Ministry of Labour's training branch, had approached Sir Walter Moberley, Chairman of the University Grants Committee. He asked him to chair a committee 'to advise the Minister on the utilisation in Government Departments or elsewhere, in the event of emergency, of personnel qualified for higher administrative posts'. (24)

The Moberley Committee blended Whitehall (Treasury, Admiralty, War Office, Air Ministry, Ministry of Labour and Department of Scientific and Industrial Research) with learned societies and professional bodies. They included the institutes of chemistry, mechanical engineering, civil engineering, electrical engineering and production engineering, the Royal Society, the Royal Institute of British Architects, three representatives from the universities, one apiece from the accountants' and employers' organisations plus a single representative from the auctioneers and estate agents institutes (to find people for requisitioning land, presumably). (25)

The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals had produced its own skeleton plan by mid-November and this was forwarded to Sir John Anderson on . November 23. It opened with a ringing declaration of purpose:

> 'The CVCP are of the opinion that the Universities and University Colleges can make a vital and specific contribution to the war-time needs of the country and they are prepared to undertake that duty'. (26)

The Vice-Chancellors displayed a range of the specialist services their people could offer. Departments of chemistry, physics, engineering, metallurgy and mathematics could help with problems

of munitions supply, aviation and transport. Medical faculties could offer assistance on safeguarding public health. The boosting of agricultural production was stressed:

> 'In addition many individual members of staffs possess skill in interpreting, translating, decoding etc. [the GC & CS brought some into Broadway Buildings in the autumn of 1938 for a bit of discreet cryptanalytical training. (27)] and general administrative experience, readily capable of adapting itself to the needs of the Civil Service machine, as illustrated in the last war'.(28)

That last, portmanteau category is interesting. It is the nearest that anybody involved in mobilising the British thinking classes for war came to mentioning what we would now call social scientists. As for that 'general administrative experience', one wonders what it amounted to. The general administrator on the 'Intellectuals' List who did best (Principal to Permanent Secretary in six years) was Oliver Franks. At the time of Munich he was 33 years old and Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University. Until September 5, 1939 when he turned up at the Ministry of Supply, 'my filing system had been a draw in my desk and the two pockets in my jacket'. (29) True, between Munich and the war he got in some practice. 'I suppose the first committees I ever chaired were probably in Glasgow when I had to do with various pre-war precautions in the Munich year. The university and the City were arranging things and I was in charge of a few of them'. (30)

By December 1938, the hybrid outfit combining Whitehall, the Universities and the professional organisations was already running. Ernest Brown, the Minister of Labour, signed letters of appointment. Soon there were little sub-groups, an 'Earmarking

Committee', even a 'Journalists Committee'. Above all, there was a Central Register, thousands of filing cards with elaborate cross-references, stored away at 569 Chiswick High Road in West London. And presiding over it was a distinguished looking 47 year-old ex-suffragette, Miss Beryl Millicent le Poer Power, only the second woman to reach the rank of Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Labour.

ENTER MISS POWER

> 'The Register contains not only a large number of names of [the] well-known - many of them sent to us by the Treasury - but also valuable qualities possessed by less well-known persons which might be put to good use by different Departments at the present time'.
>
> The Power Report, September 27, 1939. (31)

Beryl Power's road to the senior ranks of the Civil Service had been a tough one. With her sisters, Rhoda and Eileen (the legendary medieval historian) she had been left in childhood, as her Times obituary put it, 'without any support from their father. It was hardly possible in 1909, when she left school, to get a Cambridge education on scholarships alone; Beryl had to take jobs - underpaid, as she always maintained, because she was a woman - and save money before she could go to Girton'. (32) Out of such experience sprang conviction. For three years Miss Power was an organiser and speaker for the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.(33)

Success in the Civil Service Examinations put paid to that and in 1915 she entered the Board of Trade as an investigator appointed under the Trade Boards Act. A woman was a rarity in Whitehall's administrative class at that time. Miss Power encountered prejudice. A female colleague who entered the Civil Service in the 1930's recalled: 'She was one of those pioneering women who felt they had had a hard fight. It had, perhaps, left a bit of a scar.' (34) Another said 'she kicked the door open for us'. (35)

This background and her steady rise in the Board of Trade and, after it was hived-off from Trade, the Ministry of Labour, had produced a 'very forceful person' (36) by the time that war preparations obliged the Department to transform itself into a

Ministry of Labour and National Service. A lady colleague, who wishes to remain anonymous, has a clear picture of the recently promoted Assistant Secretary in the newly created national service department of the Ministry in the first days of 1939: 'solid rather than tall, dark hair, spectacles, good bust, she walked very upright. She was a little too forceful in saying what she thought without thinking too much of the effect on others'. (37) These characteristics stood her in good stead in the Blitz, however. Like many other women, Beryl Power would be accosted by men in the blackout. Her countermeasures were direct and effective. She would shine a torch on her face and say: 'Over forty and very busy', before striding on. (38) When serving in China after the war she and another lady colleague, were known as 'the British Dreadnoughts'. (39)

She owed her promotion as keeper of the Central Register to two things: the patronage of her deputy secretary, Humbert Wolfe (the poet who died in 1940), who thought very highly of her (40); and her record as a vigorous and forceful executor of business (contemporaries reckon she was not too strong on policy). (41) Compiling the 'Intellectuals' List, according to one, 'probably was her metier'. (42) Yet even Miss Power found the task daunting and she made no secret of it to her friends:.

> 'She told me over lunch she had a difficult time setting up the Central Register. I know it did bother her a lot. I have a feeling she had a slightly raw deal. There was a flavour of indignation. She was absolutely inundated with people offering their services'. (43)

Miss Power's unit was soon renamed the Central Register branch of the Ministry of Labour and National Service. It consisted of twelve officials of staff clerk grade and above, plus Sir Walter Moberly of the UGC as its Honorary Director and Supervisor.(44) It was something of a bureaucratic diaspora. Miss Power's

superiors were in Montague House. She was in Queen Anne's Chambers (co-located with the UGC). Her more senior staff were in Metropole Buildings. Her infantry were in Chiswick High Road, under the command of Mr. F. Gent brought in from the Ministry of Labour's regional organisation for the purpose. They accumulated an archive of cards, some 80,000 of them by the time war broke out. Number 569, scene of the most successful personnel operation ever mounted by the British Civil Service, is now occupied by the Direct Tyre Company and consists of three houses combined into one shop with lots of little offices above.

One of the first waves to inundate Miss Power was caused by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors. For example, on January 12, 1939, returns for the University of London arrived. This is the only surviving file to contain names and among them is an entry which turned out to be a big one. Sir Henry Tizard, himself to become one of the great boffins of World War II, compiled a list of his scientific and technical dons as Rector of Imperial College. There, under Mathematics Department (Reader) is Penney, W.G. (45) If any single man can be called the father of the British atomic bomb, it is he. 'I think I got a little form I had to fill in about which subjects I knew. I said mathematical physics'. That 'little form' set the 29-year-old William Penney on a path which led to a knighthood, a peerage and the Order of Merit.

By February 1939, the Earmarking Committee was grappling with the snags which were bound to afflict a piece of improvisation on a scale represented by the Central Register, but by its meeting on February 23, one important decision had been reached. 'Miss Power said', the minutes record, 'that the Central Register could not guarantee to find a man a job carrying the same salary as his present one, and the voluntary nature of the Register permitted the refusal of jobs offered'. Harold Parker of the Treasury added that salaries would be based on Civil Service rates.(46) Other knotty problems appeared which would persist.

For example, intellectual dynasties had much to do with some of the most successful recruiting. Professor F. A. Lindemann, Churchill's intimate, brought in proteges from Oxford University's Clarendon Laboratory to fight the boffins' war. And what became the Prime Minister's Statistical Section was filled with economists known to the Prof. (47) A similar function was performed by Noel Hall, Professor of Economics at University College, London, who found, among others, an aspirant labour politician, Hugh Gaitskell, for the Ministry of Economic Warfare where Miss Power's brother-in-law, the economic historian M.M. Postan, was also installed.(48) Individual government departments went scouting independently of the Central Register for the best and brightest known to them. Parker was resigned to this:

> 'Departments might earmark "top notchers" without going first to the Central Register, though they should keep the Register informed of the names'.(49

Some ministries, however, went too far and the Admiralty was insatiably greedy. They were talking of needing 225 physicists and the Central Register in February 1939 only had 340 on its books. H.M. Phillips, one of Miss Power's principals, set out to investigate 'whether the Admiralty were drawing a long bow'. If they were not, it might be necessary to issue an appeal to British physicists living abroad. (50)

As war aproached, the Ministries of Food, Economic Warfare and Information engaged in private enterprise to the fury of the tidy-minded Miss Power. These were new departments. The Ministry of Food grew unbelievably fast from a headquarters staff of 300 to 30,000 officials dispersed in local offices throughout the country.(51) But some established departments transgressed the Power requirements. For example, the Air Ministry took on the artist Norman Wilkinson as an adviser on camouflage and the journalist Philip Hope-Wallace as a sub-editor without consulting

the Central Register.(52)

Such confusion seems to have irritated the universities as much as it did Miss Power. On June 2, 1939 she lunched with Sir Alexander Carr-Saunders, Director of the London School of Economics and members of his staff. She minuted J.M. Glen, her immediate superior, that:

> 'They mentioned amongst other things the great uneasiness felt by members of University Staffs in London as well as at Oxford and Cambridge, at earmarkings which were obviously being done by Government Departments without reference to the Central Register or to the qualified persons available. They gave as an instance the Department [sic] of Economic Warfare where they asserted that some of the persons earmarked were not as well qualified as members of University Staffs who had not been approached even though their names were on the Central Register'.(53)

In April, Miss Power had attempted to increase the visibility of her operation to departments when she circulated a minute to the effect that 'The Central Register is now rapidly taking form, and we should be glad to assist you through the Register by putting you in touch with any groups of professional people with whom you may wish to make contact with a view to their employment in time of war'.(54)

Some departments had a legitimate security reason for sidestepping the Central Register. We have seen how Commander Denniston set about finding his men of the professor type for Bletchley. At a meeting of the Earmarking Committee on June 16, 1939, the Foreign Office representative, J.W. Nicholls, said his department 'had rather special requirements for men who were not specifically covered by the Central Register' by which he meant presumably recruits for the Secret Intelligence Service, M16.(55)

Nicholls refrained from mentioning the problem of preventing hostile intelligence services spiriting their people inside as part of an influx of temporaries (Blunt and Philby are the best known of the KGB/GRU plants). But a prescient colleague had raised the question at the February meeting of the Committee. Colonel K.J. Martin was the War Office representative (the War Office at that time was responsible for the Security Serice, M15). He said that it was impossible for the authorities to investigate the credentials of all persons registered and it was likely that the more dangerous element would have taken the trouble to obtain first-rate references'. (56)

This problem was never dealt with in World War II not even to the extent of erecting rudimentary defences like positive vetting (57); and the privateering problem was solved only after the war had started, when the Treasury and the Ministry of Labour put their collective feet down. Ernest Brown, the Minister of Labour, to his credit was concerned that 'jobbery' might rear its head.(58) Clearly, the normal Civil Service Commission procedures had to be suspended for the Intellectuals' List. Speed was of the essence. But the Central Register was, by and large, an adequate substitute as a defence against the early-nineteenth century kind of patronage. Treasury reminders of the proper procedure helped. Miss Power prepared her own solution as 'the political situation worsened'.(59)

On Saturday September 2, 1939, she was at her desk drafting the letter that would be sent to all departments 'directly war is declared between this country and Germany'.(60) It captures her brisk style and a specimen copy is preserved in the files:

Instruction No.13

CENTRAL REGISTER
Placing Procedure

Up to the present, the Central Register has been operated on the basis of the peace time procedure agreed in connection with earmarking orders from Government Departments, i.e., cards of suitable persons have been submitted direct to the ordering Department, the volunteers' willingness to be considered for the post under consideration being ascertained by the ordering Department, and not by the Central Register.

As from ....., the Central Register will be operated on the War time procedures set out in Appendix VIII to Chapter XVII of the War Book. Members of Earmarking Committees have been so informed in the letters attached, a number of copies of which have been sent to them for distribution within their Departments to persons authorised to give orders to the Central Register.

September, 1939 (61)

WAR

> 'Unless British Science had proved superior to German, and unless its strange, sinister resources had been effectively brought to bear on the struggle for surival, we might well have been defeated, and, being defeated, destroyed.'
>
> Sir Winston Churchill, 1949 (62)

At 9 am on Sunday September 3, 1939, an ultimatum to Berlin was delivered from the British Government. Unless German Forces were withdrawn from Poland, Britain would be at war with Germany. At 11 am the ultimatum expired and the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, broadcast to the nation.(63) The Ministry of Labour had a fair scattering of staff at their posts as the Prime Minister approached the microphone, including Miss Power and two of her Principals, C.J. Maston and Anthony Sutherland. Shortly after 11 o'clock, Sutherland's phone rang. "Sutherland", said Miss Power, "There's a war. Come to my office at once." (64)

> "When the alarm sounded at 11:15 - horrors, Miss Power had forgotten to bring her gas-mask! Maston and I had to decide which would risk his life for a lady by giving up ours!" (65)

Commander Denniston, head of the Government Code and Cypher School, and one of the best informed people in Whitehall when it came to events in Europe, was also at his desk in Broadway Buildings that Sunday drafting a letter to the Clerk's Department of the Foreign Office which controlled his manpower. Referring with sublime understatement to the activities of Hitler, he wrote: 'For some days now we have been obliged to recruit from

our emergency list men of the Professor type who the Treasury agreed to pay at the rate of £600 a year. I attach herewith a list of these gentlemen already called up together with the dates of their joining. I will keep you informed at intervals of further recruitment.' (66)

The first list was pretty impressive:

Mr R. Bacon	15th August
Mr L.W.Forster	24th August
Professor G.Waterhouse	29th August
Professor W.H. Bruford	29th August
Mr N. de Grey	29th August
Mr R. Gore Brown	30th August
Professor Vincent	30th August
Professor T.S.R. Boase	2nd September. (67)

The second list was, if anything, even more glittering with some of the greatest names ever to work in the trade:

Mr A.T. Hatto	4th September
Professor F. Norman	4th September
Mr J.R.F. Jeffries	4th September
Mr W.G. Welchman	4th September
Professor F.E. Adcock	4th September
Professor A.H. Campbell	4th September
Professor H.M. Last	4th September
Mr A.M. Turing	4th September. (68)

Never in the history of British cryptography has so much talent been recruited in a single day. Denniston's people, who could not be mentioned in Churchill's memoirs for fear of compromising the Ultra Secret, and A.P. Rowe's radar experts at the Telecommunications Resarch Establishment at Malvern, fit perfectly with the 'strange, sinister resources' described by the

old warrior. (69)

Monday, September 4 was also the day on which the Power empire pressed its buttons. Her stiff note on the use of the Register was despatched to departments. The telegrams went out. One landed on the desk of Professor Franks in Glasgow. It read 'Go to the Ministry of Supply' as if it had come from the Community Chest in a game of Monopoly. He caught the night train to Euston.(70) Lord Franks does not fit the boffin category. He was picked to be one of 'the 100 Principals who will be required on the outbreak of war,' a need identified by Miss Power in May 1939.(71)

The declaration of war meant that the Central Register was, at last, truly in business. Beryl Power was asked to produce a report for her Minister. On September 27, 24 days after the outbreak of hostilities, it was completed. In a covering note to Glen, she wrote 'the flagrant abuses of the early days in respect of certain Departments should not re-occur'. According to the Power Report, 2,582 vacancies had been submitted by departments to the register before September 3 and 1,839 since, with a particular rush of requests from the Service Departments. She noted that the Treasury had submitted a number of 'well-known' names which would suggest that their famous List of the Good and Great had been trawled for her purposes. She was candid about shortcomings: 'Certain sections of the Register are deficient either because the demand exceeds supply (e.g. telecommunications) or because many employers prevented their employees from coming on the Register (e.g. electrical engineering).' Her conclusion struck an optimistic note:

> 'It is reasonable to expect some dislocation in the first few weeks of the war when new Departments are getting into their stride. We have every reason to hope that, even though we must have missed many valuable opportunities of placing suitable people in

certain of the big Departments which failed in the early days of the war to use the Central Register, we shall be increasingly used as the services we are able to supply get better known.'(72)

There is evidence to suggest that Miss Power's forecast was vindicated. Her 'panels of experts' brought in to assist in placing people appear to have chosen well. The file records that 'a consulting engineer gave a week of his time voluntarily to the War Office 'browsing' over the cards in the Central Register in order to pick out names of people who might be of value to that Department and to the Ministry of Supply. He subsequently said that he was much impressed with the Register and particularly with the method of classification adopted.'(73) Certainly, the services of the Power team were drawn on increasingly in the first months of the war:

PLACINGS PER FORTNIGHT

SEP 30, 1939	45
OCT.14, 1939	38
OCT.31, 1939	264
NOV.15, 1939	745
NOV.30, 1939	292
DEC.15, 1939	733
DEC.31, 1939	332
JAN.15, 1940	404
JAN.31, 1940	423
FEB.15, 1940	248. (74)

There were shortcomings naturally. The national trawl for talent inevitably netted some unfortunates. H.C.Head, one of Miss Power's staff clerks, in a minute to A.A. Bytheway, staff clerk higher grade, dated August 22, 1940, noted:

'During the six months ended 30 June, 1940, the number

> of persons registered increased from 84,800 to 108,700 and quite a large proportion of these fresh registrations were attributable to the broadcast statement in May which asked engineers who were immediately available to inform Central Register to that effect'.

He went on in a world-weary manner familiar to clerical officers the world over:

> 'On every occasion where newspaper or broadcast by wireless has mentioned the Register or any posts in the national machine which are under consideration, the Register becomes deluged with correspondence from unfortunately unemployed, from cantankerous hardy annuals, opportunists, egoists and cranks. The amount of tracing and filing which falls to be done is therefore out of all proportion to any requirements of selecting officers and has increased tremendously in the six months under review'.(75)

While Head was grappling with his fruitcakes, some hefty talent was lying unused even though all the required particulars were held in Chiswick High Road. William Penney found himself at a loose end for the first six months of the war. Imperial College had been scattered - one part going to Edinburgh, another to Swansea while a small rump stayed in London and this included those registered with Miss Power. Since Lord Penney had no teaching duties, he took care of the finances of the students' union and rationing.(76)

Finally he received 'a letter from a civil servant' asking him to meet Sir Geoffrey Taylor, the legendary applied mathematician from Cambridge, in the Athenaeum. Taylor wanted Penney to join him on explosives research, a subject about which as 'a quantum man' he knew nothing at that time. He was asked to calculate the

wave effect of underwater explosions - working in the main from home. Later he moved on to the effect of waves on the Mulberry Harbours being built for D-Day. After the invasion of Normandy he was transferred to the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research and sent to Los Alamos in New Mexico to work on the atomic bomb.(77)

Statisticians were like 'gold dust' in wartime Whitehall, according to Lord Croham who passed into the administrative class of the Civil Service in 1939 after taking a First in Economics and Statistics at LSE.(He was later to become Permanent Secretary to the Treasury and Head of the Home Civil Service). Before he could take up his job, however, the University of London Appointments Board had sent him to the Army, ignoring entirely the purpose for which the Central Register was established. He found himself an acting Captain commanding ack-ack batteries in the London Suburbs. His Brigade headquarters never forwarded the requests from the Ministry of Labour for statisticians. 'Never mind. I've no regrets. The Army made me', he recalled.(78)

Another statistician who also went on to higher things found himself working for the Ministry of Agriculture in Oxford. Then, in 1940, his patron, Sir William Beveridge, had him transferred to the Anglo-French Co-ordinating Committee, which led to a post in the War Cabinet Secretariat a year later. His name was Harold Wilson.(79) As for Beveridge, Master of University College, Oxford, where the precocious Wilson had been made a don at the age of 21, his persistent attempts to find wartime employment in government took a long time to achieve results.

Beveridge, author of the best read report of World War II (on social insurance in 1942) and probably the most famous piece of social policy analysis in official history, had been a temporary civil servant in World War I. He had been made Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Food at the age of 39. However, he lacked charm and tact and that great Whitehall virtue, the

ability to oil the cogs. He made enemies. According to conventional official and political wisdom, he was gifted but difficult. So his offers of assistance were politely rejected. But, as his biographer Jose Harris noted, he was in exalted company.

> 'Beveridge's experience was shared by other veterans of First World War administration such as Keynes, [Walter] Layton and [Arthur] Salter; and throughout the autumn and winter of 1939-40 this group of 'ancient warhorses' met together at Keynes' house in Bloomsbury, where they denounced the Chamberlain government's lack of coherent policy, criticised the dispersal of Whitehall departments to the provinces, and devised alternative strategies for prosecution of the war'. (80)

After Churchill's assumption of power in May 1940 'one by one the other old warhorses were absorbed into government - Keynes into the Treasury, Salter into the Admiralty, Layton into the Ministry of Supply - but once again there seemed to be no place for Beveridge.'(81) He approached Churchill directly and received what Mrs Jessy Mair, his secretary and future wife, described as a 'very damping reply'.(82) Eventually, he secured a toehold. In July 1940, Ernest Bevin, Brown's replacement as Minister of Labour, asked Beveridge to make a quick survey of the Government's manpower requirements.(83) A year later, Bevin, anxious to be rid of this least congenial of social scientists, steered him out of the Ministry of Labour into what was expected to be a backwater - chairmanship of the Committee on Social Insurance.(84) The rest, as the saying goes, is history.

IMPACT

'It's very unlike the Great and Good. They really were winners!'

Sir John Winnifrith, 1985. (85)

How were Miss Power's people deployed in what H.C. Head called 'the national machine'? The answer is in almost every capacity except that of a Minister. Some like Franks shone in the performance of traditional administrative class functions like giving policy advice, while developing the managerial skill of ensuring that huge war industries delivered materiel for the Armed Forces. Some like R.V. Jones and Alan Turing proved to be geniuses at the rapid harnessing of original research to practical problems: the bending of radar beams in Jones' case, or the need to speed up the decoding of communications with what are now regarded as the prototype computers in Turing's. Others like Keynes and Lionel Robbins played the classic role of economic adviser. Richard Stone invented the whole new system of national income accounts. A battery of irregulars in the Economic Section of the War Cabinet Ofice combined the functions of backroom and frontroom boy. They designed and helped to install a rationing mechanism which, through its points system, preserved a measure of choice within the limits of a siege economy. Norman Chester, another member of the Economic Section, acted as secretary to Beveridge and his team of insiders. G.C. Allen, Brunner Professor of Economic Science at Liverpool University, joined the Board of Trade and using his detailed knowledge of British industry combined with like-minded irregulars, such as Gaitskell, Ruth Cohen and Grace Coleman and one or two sympathetic insiders (most notably W. Hughes and C.K. Hobson) to pioneer anti-restrictive practice policies. This bore fruit after the war in legislation creating the Monopolies and Restrictive Practices Commission.

Many of these activities and individuals have acquired a retrospective glamour. But wartime Whitehall needed its doers, its unsung heroes. Some 600 of them were, for example, found to augment the Office of Works that cinderella department, which almost overnight had to cover the country with Royal Ordnance Factories to produce the sinews of war. W.L. Wilson, who has written their story, recalled that:

> 'Rumour had it that the 20 years of peace and limited funds had had an adverse effect on the skills, experience, outlook and opportunities of those engaged on the production of munitions. Certainly there was an old-fashioned air surrounding designs and attitudues in the halcyon days of 1936.
>
> 'But new men were brought in: Mitchell who was to deal with Filling Factories in a very effective fashion, Dally and Norrey who were to play leading parts in construction activities, Baker (later engaged on the PLUTO pipelines) who took on the construction of all power stations, and many others.
>
> 'Neilson and Sizer, permanent officers of the Department, grew in stature, and so a trickle of activity slowly swelled to a flood. In due course, to build a new factory became almost a casual event'. (86)

A simple list of Office of Works constructions between 1939 and 1945 gives an indication of the prodigious performance required from regulars and irregulars alike:

> CORDITE FACTORIES
> Bishopton (3)
> Wrexham(2)
> Ramskill(2)

TNT FACTORIES
Pembrey
Irvine
Drigg
Sellafield

RDX FACTORY
Bridgewater

FILLING FACTORIES
Chorley
Elstow
Bridgend
Brackla
Hirwaun
Glascoed
Thorpe Arch
Aycliffe

MISCELLANEOUS
Patricroft(tanks)
Pendine(weapons)
Shrawardine(stores)
Ditton Priors
Beith(stores)
Chobham(tanks and technology)
Farnborough(wheeled vehicles)
Flax factories(5)
Hostels(miners, Land Army)
Hospitals(American and others)
Protected Accommodation(citadels)
Royal Observer Corps Centres
Prisoner of War Camps(250)
Warminster Ground Equipment Depot
Opencast Coal screening and Washing Plants
Underground Storage(for treasures and strategic

materials).(87)

W.L.Wilson's point about career officials growing in stature, as the tasks imposed upon them mounted, is significant. World War II enfranchised many gifted people previously consigned to the remotest of backrooms. One such was D.C.(later Sir Donald) Bailey inventor of the famous military bridge which bore his name. He was 37 when the war broke out and had been a War Office engineer for eleven years: it took Hitler to make the military and the Civil Service to take his bridge seriously as his Times obituary made clear:

> 'As early as 1936 he had worked out the broad principle of his invention but received no official encouragement.'(88)

The principle of it was simple. The Bailey Bridge was made up of rectangular trussed welded steel units ten feet long and almost five feet high. Each unit could be handled by six men, and bridges of all sizes and shapes could be constructed in lego-fashion - an ideal instrument for pursuing armies which were dynamiting bridges as they retreated. But as The Times obituarist noted:

> 'His department sponsored several types of temporary bridge, but were developing a design of individual tubular members pin-jointed at the site. Bailey doubted its merits; he preferred unit panel construction and by 1940 had produced a completely detailed design ready to be made and tested.
>
> 'This the War Office was too busy to arrange until, in January 1941, the model tubular bridge failed under test at Christchurch. They then ordered a full-scale trial of Bailey's bridge to take place within three months'.(89)

It worked. Mass production was ordered. Some 600 companies making windows, greenhouses and bedsteads were converted to Bailey Bridge production.

The wartime emergency brought forward some highly unlikely Whitehall characters in totally unforseeable directions. Take Martin Roseveare, a Cambridge mathematician who had taught at Repton and Haileybury before joining the Board of Education as an inspector of schools in 1927. When war broke out he was Staff Inspector of Mathematics. Lord Woolton, the Minister of Food, needed 'a civil servant with the highest possible mathematical qualifications to devise, if humanly possible, a fool-proof and fraud-proof ration book'.(90) Roseveare was produced and given the brief of compressing all the clever schemes devised by the brilliant economic irregulars in the Cabinet Office, the Ministry of Food, the Board of Trade and elsewhere into 'a volume of handy size for the housewife whose contents lasted for a year'.(91) Roseveare laboured mightily and tested his dummies on his wife and her friends. As his obituarist noted gently, 'Roseveare was wont to take a little pride in the fact that from being an apparently repressive document at the war's outset the ration book came through successive editions to be seen as a guide to a balanced and healthy diet given the siege conditions of life in Britain at war'.(92)

Sir Martin Roseveare's fruitful partnership with the irregulars illustrates another significant trait of wartime Whitehall - a breakdown in those carefully polished peacetime distinctions between administrators and specialists, between one grade and another and between one department and another. The overriding need to solve problems and to implement solutions thoroughly and swiftly was a great solvent and stimulant and it pushed forward those who could deliver wherever they came from and whatever their station. Lord Penney for example, has no doubts about the quickening effect of new, young blood on the 'rather sedate older

men' who had grown to maturity in prewar Whitehall R and D establishments.(93)

Before leaving the impact of Miss Power's proteges, it is worth examining a couple of the more successful cases - one a general administrator, the other a professional - to see which factors were crucial in achieving effectiveness. Douglas Jay, a former colleague, has written that 'there was nothing ambiguous about the reputation which Franks acquired as the most competent temporary civil servant in the war machine'.(94) The Ministry of Supply which Lord Franks entered on September 5, 1939, was in the process of growing from nothing (it was established the previous April though Chamberlain did not get round to appointing a Minister till July.(95)) to a mega-Ministry with hundreds of thousands of employees tackling the issue of the hour - the production of munitions. Franks found it 'a chaotic place put together out of some people from the Board of Trade, some people from the war office and complete amateurs like me. The result was that if you had an idea of what you wanted to do there was very little to stop you doing it.' (96)

By the time Douglas Jay arrived at the Ministry's headquarters at Shell-Mex House in the Strand in December 1940, Franks was already a Principal Assistant Secretary (equivalent to an Under Secretary today) and an Olympian figure. He had acquired a reputation for speed, attention to detail and a natural judiciousness rare in one then so young [he was 35], but of great value in resolving disputes. Franks' secret seems to have been an ability to work with the grain and to outperform the career officials without causing offence. He took to their culture like a file to a cabinet while bringing to it the freshness of the outsider. In his first few weeks, Jay was summoned to a meeting at which several of the best-known irregulars were in attendance. In fact, the impression given is that they were swamping the regular Civil Serice:

> 'I was invited to attend for the Ministry of Supply, with Franks and Geoffrey Crowther [ex-Economist newspaper], a very superior meeting of the official Manpower Requirements Committee...presided over by Sir William Beveridge in person. Franks also told me that Beveridge...had brought in as secretary of the committee a very young and very clever statistician from Oxford called Harold Wilson. There they both were across the table in a Whitehall committee room, rather like an owl and a sparrow: Beveridge, august, white-haired, venerable and dogmatic; and Wilson, diminutive, chubby and chirpy.'(97)

Franks, 'who moved every few months on to a higher bureaucratic rank', (98) according to Jay, was not, 'the ideal choice, some might have thought, for the higher direction of an unparalleled wartime mobilisation. But Franks possessed not merely an outstanding talent for manipulating a huge organisation, but a rare intuition into the psychology of colleagues, high or low, and not least of those in the business world.'(99) Only once, it seems, did his intuition let him down. At the end of 1940, Jay was allocated a new assistant, Monica Felton:

> 'a young woman of marked ability, unhappily half crippled by polio. Her disability naturally excited the sympathy of all of us; and when I was told most confidentially that she was the mistress of the then Chairman of the House of Commons Select Committee on National Expenditure, I ignored this as wholly irrelevant.'(100)

She turned out, however, to have a habit of 'inexcusably ignoring her job'.(101) She was transferred, but the habit persisted. Franks and Jay fired her:

> 'We were somewhat surprised when after a few weeks she

> was appointed as a clerk to the Select Committee on National Expenditure; and even more surprised when some weeks later the Committee published a report on the Ministry of Supply Filling Factories. Next we were told there was to be a secret debate in the House on this Report, in which Duncan [Minister of Supply] and Bevin [Minister of Labour] would speak for the Government. Duncan, it was felt, must be told of the curious relationship involved. But should Bevin be told also?'

The Permanent Secretary, Sir William Douglas, decided that he should.

> 'But who should tell him? Answer of course: Mr Franks. With much careful stage-management, it was contrived that Franks should meet Bevin absolutely alone in the latter's own personal office, and confide in him with due solemnity, in the greatest privacy, the terrible secret. On hearing it, Bevin replied: "'Undreds of people have told me that." (102)'

Bevin was a great admirer of Franks, even though their backgrounds (both were west countrymen) were totally different. Bevin a product of the soil, Franks of the cloth. As Foreign Secretary, Bevin called Franks back from Oxford first to negotiate the Marshall Plan and later to be Ambassador to Washington. Bevin knew how to use his officials, regular and irregular alike.

Ministerial aptitude and capability was crucial in determining whether the talent found by Miss Power was turned to good effect or squandered as as another gifted irregular, a specialist this time, discovered. Professor Lionel Robbins was another scholar kept on the sidelines for the duration of the 'Phoney War'.

By the Spring of 1940, when the real war began, life in Cambridge - to which the LSE had been evacuated - became unbearable:

> 'Morning after morning brought news of fresh defeats and defections; and here we were, with all our potential unutilised, drooling out routine instructions which had suddenly seemed to lose all relevance. Of course, this was all wrong. It was very important to keep alive the lamp of learning and to maintain a sense of its significance among those who, either because of extreme youth or some other disability, were unable to man the defences.
>
> 'Nevertheless, a lack of patience was not unnatural in the circumstances. I am not ashamed of the intense feeling of relief with which, lifting the telephone one afternoon at home, I heard the voice of Austin Robinson [E.A.G. Robinson, Reader in Economics at Cambridge seconded to the Cabinet Office in 1939] speaking on behalf of the assistant secretary responsible, inviting me to join the Office of the War Cabinet as an economic assistant. I need hardly say that I accepted there and then.' (103)

Robbins, who rose rapidly to the Directorship of the Economic Section of the War Cabinet Secretariat in 1941, found himself part of an extremely talented team - Robinson, Richard Stone, John Jewkes, Harry Campion, Ely Devons, Stanley Denison, James Meade and Harold Wilson. (104) But there was a problem. They were led by Francis Hemming, a career official and the Assistant Secretary on whose behalf Robinson had picked up the phone:

> 'Hemming, although intensely ambitious, was not the man to organise such an enterprise successfully. He had his speck of inspiration in realising at an early stage that economists and statisticians would be needed at

> the centre. But he was extremely unwise in his relations with his equals and superiors in his own office and still more so with those in other departments. Furthermore, he was not a good administrator or a good manager of men.' (105)

To complete his acid pen portrait, Robbins dwelt on Hemming's physical peculiarities and his tobacco stains adding, for good measure, that 'Francis's acquaintance with the economic and statistical concepts of the national income must have been zero if not negative.' (106)

In the autumn of 1940, however, Robbins et al were rescued both from Hemming and from ministerial neglect. The number crunchers were hived off into a new Central Statistical Office. A separate Economic Section was created. It found itself the instrument of some powerful and appreciative patrons, both ministerial and bureaucratic:

> 'The economists....were made responsible to Sir John Anderson - Lord Waverley as he later became - the Lord President of the Council, with Norman Brook, at that time personal assistant to the Lord President, directly in charge, and Edward Bridges [Secretary of the War Cabinet], that fundamental connecting link of the whole war administration, with a friendly interest in our doings. This was delivery indeed.' (107)

The Economic Section never looked back. Churchill effectively hived-off the Home Front to Anderson and his Lord President's Committee while he and the Chiefs-of-Staff got on with the war. This was problem-solving at its best. They had the right blend of people. They knitted together some pioneering information systems. They had powerful patrons. They wielded clout. The Defence of the Realm Act, the rationing system and manpower controls gave them instruments of unparalleled power for

implementation. Norman Chester reckoned 'in the sphere of general economic policy there were probably twenty to fifty people in Whitehall who, if their views coincided, could do almost anything.' (108) The Home Front became an adventure playground for conscripted social scientists.

AFTERMATH

> ' Can it be doubted that this new blood would have benefited the service even had there been no war?'
>
> D N Chester, 1951. (109)

The reform Hitler forced on Whitehall was undone by the peace because we neither tried nor cared to devise its peacetime equivalent. This represents probably the greatest lost opportunity in the history of British public administration. The irregulars, one by one, went back to their universities, their companies, their law practices, their old professions as if they were soldiers receiving a handshake and a demob suit. Some were offered permanent establishment. Franks could have had pretty well any post he liked. But from being the public servant who wielded the greatest ever powers over British industry, he seized the offer of the one job he had always wanted, the Provostship of his old College, The Queen's, in Oxford, though within two years he answered the Foreign Secretary's call and returned to public service. R.V. Jones took the Chair of Natural Philosophy at Aberdeen. Gaitskell and Wilson stood for Parliament. Robbins went back to the LSE. Keynes negotiated the American loan, came home to Sussex and died. Jay moved into No 10 as Attlee's economic adviser before winning a by-election in 1946.

Beryl Power had been transferred to the Ministry of Supply in 1941 to run its housing and welfare side. After the war she went to China as a consultant on administration and welfare policies for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. She remained in China and the Far East, though still officially on the books of the Ministry of Labour, until her retirement from the public service in 1951. In later life she chaired the Over Forty Association for Women Workers and died, an asthmatic, on November 4, 1974, her work forgotten, if it was ever known

outside a small Whitehall circle, and unrecognised in any Honours List.

Some of her people stayed on in postwar Whitehall. Penney and the British contingent at Los Alamos came home to make a British bomb. R.W.B. 'Otto' Clarke, gifted journalist, inventor of the Financial Times Index, who had joined the Ministry of Information in 1939, moving through Economic Warfare, Production and Supply, joined the Treasury in 1945. He decided to remain, and rose to the rank of Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Technology in 1966. Writing of the post-1945 Treasury, Sir Alec Cairncross judges him the only official with 'any real flair for general economic policy'. (110) Austin Robinson came back for a while to join Sir Edwin Plowden (a businessman brought in as a wartime temporary to the Ministry of Economic Warfare) in his new Central Economic Planning Staff created in 1947. The Economic Section carried on in the Cabinet Office first under James Meade and later Robert Hall. But elsewhere, the specialists dwindled:

> 'With the death of Keynes the Treasury were left without any professional economist to advise them and felt the loss very severely. The Board of Trade had an economic adviser up to 1950 and there were one or two professional economists in administrative or statistical posts. Other departments with the exception of Agriculture, Food and the Joint Intelligence Committee, had none or, at most, one.' (111)

A Cabinet Committee on the Machinery of Government had been at work since 1942, initially under Anderson's chairmanship. But it did not seek to build on the human capital found by Miss Power.(112) Attlee, who inherited Anderson's superb Lord President's machine in 1943 when Anderson moved to the Treasury, showed no interest in reforming Whitehall when he became Prime Minister. Presumably he too had seen the past and it had worked.

The Reconstruction Competitions run by the Civil Service Commission from 1946 to telescope six lost years of recruitment to the administrative class, did not seek a new model civil servant. Northcote and Trevelyan would have approved of the young men and women who passed out of Sir Percival Waterfield's Civil Service Selection Board, a copy (minus the physical jerks) of the War Office Selection Boards which found the younger segment of the World War II Officer Class.(113) Bridges' famous 'Portrait of a Profession' lecture delivered at Cambridge in 1950 was a pure nineteenth century performance. It talked of the need for the civil servant to give his Minister 'the fullest benefit of the storehouse of departmental experience; and to let the waves of the practical philosophy was against ideas put forward by his Ministerial Master' and its regret that Whitehall was lacking 'in those expressions of a corporate life found in a college. We have neither hall nor chapel, neither combination room nor common room.' (114) Hitler, World War II, and the Central Register might as well not have happened. It was back to business as usual.

During the war it had been possible to believe that with the 'Old Gang' of appeasers discredited, things would never be the same again. Meritocracy would prevail. Clever scholarship boys, scientists even, would be permanently enfranchised. Churchill himself was affected by the spirit of the times. In August 1941 he told Lord Halifax, the British Ambassador to Washington:

> '....that it was the secondary schoolboys who had saved this country. "They have", he said, "the right to rule it." '(115)

The boffins, in the afterglow of the achievements of Bletchley, Malvern and so on, were given in December 1946 what was meant to be a new charter. As one of his last services to government, Maurice Hankey, by this time in retirement and chairman of the Technical Personnel Committee, drafted a White Paper on the

Scientific Civil Service.(116)

Just how little lasting effect that document - and the war-shortening performance of British scientists - really had on the mentality of the higher Civil Service can be judged from background briefing notes reflecting the views of 'various permanent scretaries' prepared inside the Treasury at the time of the Priestley Royal Commission on Civil Service Pay. Dated November 1, 1954, and headlined 'points in favour of the Administrator, as contrasted with the 'specialist', it reads:

> 'Wider view-points. Duty to keep in mind greater variety of considerations. The Specialist's contribution to policy (if any) is confined to specialist considerations: administrator must take account of these and others too.
>
> 'Greater versatility: must be capable of being switched from one job to another with quite different content.
>
> 'More wear and tear. Takes main impact of Ministerial, Parliamentary and PAC [Public Accounts Committee] requirements. 'Cushions' and 'carries the can for' the specialists.
>
> 'Recruitment is much more selective: the average AP [Assistant Principal] entrant is a superior article to the average SO [Scientific Officer] entrant'.(117)

LESSONS

> 'In Washington Lord Halifax once whispered to Lord Keynes:
> "It's true they have the money bags, but we have all the brains".'
>
> Anonymous verse found in British papers dealing with negotiation of the American Loan, 1945.(118)
>
> "We should not be squeamish about backing people rather than the system."
>
> Lord Rayner, 1984 (119)

It is true that there was the occasional spurt of new blood into postwar Whitehall. Plowden's Central Economic Planning Staff, a kind of economic and industrial think tank for Attlee and his senior ministers, was a worthwhile enterprise that has yet to find its chronicler. Harold Macmillan brought in Sir Percy Mills, his favourite industrialist, to help his huge housing drive in the early 1950s. Churchill in his last premiership made Lindemann Paymaster-General with a seat in the Cabinet (the old Statistical Section enjoyed a brief revival) and Lord Salter was made a Minister of State. In more recent times, the special adviser experiment conducted by the two major parties and, more importantly, Mr Edward Heath's Central Policy Review Staff which surived 13 years and four prime ministers, (120) were attempts in minature to reproduce wartime experience though they were not conceived as such.

It might have been thought that when Harold Wilson moved into Downing Street with his intimate memories of wartime Whitehall, a substantial infusion of outside talent would have taken place. But Wilson was a small 'c' conservative in such matters, almost a permanent secretary manque. In an interview with Norman Hunt

before the 1964 general election he put paid to any gradiose expectations: 'Perhaps the effect of having been a civil servant is that one is, to some extent, in a Whitehall phrase, 'housetrained', and one wants to see any experts properly dovetailed into the administrative machine.' (121)

In some cases, the reluctance to use the equivalents of the skilled wartime irregulars in peacetime was nothing short of profligate. The anonymous poet who penned the rhyme tossed from one member of the British team negotiating the American loan to another, may have overstated the case. Yet good old British brainpower is our biggest fixed capital asset. As we have seen, just about the best of it was housed at Bletchley Park between 1939 and 1945. Some of the dons who returned to their colleges after waging their most secret war offered to return to the GC & CS for occasional refresher courses in case their services (the cold war was under way) were required again. Even they were rebuffed. (122)

In one area of public life, periodic use was made of the experienced human capital accumulated in wartime. Many of Miss power's irregulars went on to the Treasury's List of the Good and Great and performed sterling service on Royal Commissions and Committees of Inquiry.(123) Reports bearing the names of Redcliffe-Maud, Fulton, Radcliffe and Franks punctuate the postwar period. Senior men in Whitehall would sometimes wonder over the lunch table in the late 1970s and early 1980s where the successor generation of good and great chairman would come from. Sir Reginald Hibbert, former Ambassador Paris, and Director of the Ditchley Foundation, believes:

> 'There will be a very serious problem when there is no Lord Franks. I imagine that it may be possible to fnd what you might call a Lord Franks substitute. But, of course, the generation that Lord Franks belongs to was formed during the war and there has been no national

> experience like since and the chances of really top people emerging is that much reduced.' (124)

The generation of young civil servants recruited in Sir Percy Waterfield's reconstruction competitions had also been formed in war on the battlefields, in the air and at sea. According to one of them, Lord Bancroft, who rose to the summit of his profession, 'they began their official lives believing that virtually everything was achievable.' (125) They retired in the late 1970s and early 1980s disappointed and often disillusioned men. Lord Allen of Abbeydale, a pre-war entrant who retired as Permanent Secretary to the Home Office in 1973, openly expressed the growing self-doubt of his profession in 1975:

> 'The Service must clearly bear its share of the responsibility for the failures (as well as the successes) of government since the Second World War, and for its contribution to the policies followed by this country in a period which has seen such decline in its role in the world. The service was certainly slow to begin reforming itself after the war to reflect changes in society and the role of government.' (126)

Such thoughts intensified as the seventies progressed among the generation which believes that reform of Whitehall <u>is</u> possible and became a staple theme among an increasing number of external critics of the performance of the Civil Service. The need for newer or younger blood was frequently coupled with attacks on both the vitality and the competence of Whitehall's lifers. The most sharply worded critique of all was delivered by Sir John Hoskyns in 1982 within months of his departure from Mrs Thatcher's Downing Street Policy Unit. He compared 1980's Whitehall unfavourably with that of the 1940's Whitehall:

'It is a paradox that when government was arguably at its most effective, during the war, it was full of motivated outsiders: while, ever since, we have mistakenly assumed that government can do almost as much in peacetime as in war, but without fresh infusions of outside vigour and talent.' (127)

It is intriguing to discover just how many of the problems of 1980s government were apparent to the irregulars 40 years earlier. Take the phenomenon political scientists later called 'overload'. Inevitably, the wartime machine had to work flat out from start to finish (and the Attlee years which followed were scarcely restful). Writing in 1951, D.N. Chester noted:

'There are, of course, devices for reducing the load of work on the small number of key ministers and officials. But the fact remains that during the war there were so many decisions to be made, of such importance and affecting such a wide range of interests - in Whitehall and overseas - and the number of people in the position to make or capable of making such decisions was so limited that no devices other than an outright rejection of responsibility could have relieved these persons of a very heavy load.'

'Only people of a strong physique could stand for long the strain involved; indeed, it is doubtful whether any ordinary human being could stand the strain for more than a few years without his health being impaired and his losing efficiency through sheer loss of staying power. Any government machine which continued at such a pace year after year could only maintain its initial vigour and freshness by replacing this small key group at regular intervals.' (128)

R.V. Jones pre-echoed a later Whitehall concern - the inability of ministers and generalist administrators to grapple with science and technology, or even relatively simple figures and quantities - in his early days in wartime Whitehall when:

> '.....my evenings were spent discussing cryptography, my days went in perusing the S.I.S files. These were not inspiring, for they were very weak on matters concerning science and technology, since (in common with most Ministers of the Crown and their Permanent Secretaries) the average S.I.S. agent was a scientific analphabet.' (129)

His diagnosis though, while couched in more restrained language, was repeated by Sir Burke (now Lord) Trend, the Secretary of the Cabinet in the discussions which preceded the setting up of the Central Policy Review Staff. It was one of the reasons why Trend advised Mr Heath to pick Lord Rothschild to head it. (130)

Indeed, the history of Miss Power's irregulars has important lessons for those who would inject new blood into Whitehall now. But first there is a big difference which we have to acknowledge before attempting to identify the lessons which can be learned. Munich and the sense of national emergency it created, allowed the Ministry of Labour's headhunters to suck up talent, like some giant vacuum cleaner, wherever it was concealed in the British Isles. The remotest laboratory, the most obscure department of classics or philosophy were not immune from their attentions. Whitehall's rates of pay - rarely competitive except with the academic world - were no barrier in the crisis of wartime. Duty prevailed. There was, after all, the capacity to direct labour under the Defence of the Realm Act. None of this applies in peacetime as R.V. Jones recognised when he wrote of postwar Government service that its 'scientists are largely recruited from those who have fallen out from the academic competition' and, with equal relevance, of the premium 'placed in a modern

scientific career upon undue concentration at an early age' which does not equip scientists for life in the world-at-large:

> 'This ignorance may even become a habit....when the energy of the hothouse-forced scientist declines, or when, finding himself outmanoeuvred in his first few clashes with professional and classically bred administrators, he retires embittered into his laboratory.'(131)

Bearing all such caveats in mind, what could a future prime minister, wishing to freshen up the members of the Civil Service learn from 1939-45? First and foremost, the lesson is that the most superb human capital resides in Britain albeit scattered in a diaspora of the intellect. Who but for Hitler would have heard of Franks or Penney? There are such people today. They tend not to push themselves forward (Franks and Penney were - are - very retiring men). The compilers of the List of the Good and the Great rarely tap them. When looking for new blood, merit and capability must be the criterion. Political conviction is pretty well irrelevant. Political prejudice is abundant and cheap. With rare exceptions, those whose ambition is to come into departments as ministerial special advisers are not in the same league as the class of 1939-45 or, indeed, of their latter-day equivalents.

The most important motivation for recruiting outsiders today should be to put together teams or task forces to solve problems - not some vague desire to bring in a wider cross section at principal level. Grades and hierarchies should not be allowed to get in the way. They did not in World War II. The great divide between generalists and specialists is as artificial as it is malign. Furthermore new blood must not be allowed to go stale or to go native. Regular transfusions are required not once-and-for-all injections. The best of the career regulars, would, if Lord Penney's recollections are a guide, gain a new

lease of life from contact with truly talented irregulars.

Even those in the scientific Civil Service with high professional qualifications can be unworldly and naive about matters beyond their immediate experience. It would be rare nowadays to find anyone with the equivalent of Lord Penney's early background as an apprentice in the Royal Dockyards. Scientists brought in from universities can be even more out of touch with the rush and tumble of the commercial and political world. With money short, it is now more important for, say, a head of a Research Council to be an MBA than an FRS.

If Whitehall set out to do deliberately in peacetime what the war did accidentally it would, naturally, be a lower-key affair. But two clear benefits would flow. First of all, a task force approach to policy problems - finding the team you need however dispersed it may be inside Whitehall or outside, or trapped in a backwater or an outstation - would achieve much. It would dissolve the barriers of hierarchy and reduce the insider-outsider divide and increase the chance of finding solutions.

A second reason for bringing in outsiders should be to help to develop a pool of talent in Britain through what would amount to an elite training programme which could build up a significant national resource. Perhaps it would be going too far to suggest that there should be centrally-directed career development for such people, moving them in and out of Whitehall in a planned way. Yet the public sector needs to develop the talents of those who will become vice-chancellors, heads of research laboratories, chairmen of quangos or of other bodies on the fringes of Whitehall - not to mention the few who will reach the very heart of Government. Things can be done to identify and develop ability and we should learn to do better.

In a small way, outsider organisations like the Industrial

Reorganisation Corporation did this in the 1960s and the Central Policy Review Staff in the seventies and early eighties. The IRC and CPRS were such rarities as to be almost collectors' items. A more flexible Whitehall operating in a team or task-force style would provide greater opportunities for a wider and faster circulation of talent, with organisations in the public and private sectors seconding most people to government for two to five years. Cumulatively, the effect could be to produce an impressive cadre of experienced people ready to take up senior management and policy jobs in their forties.

The case of the IRC, at least, has been documented by Douglas Hague and Geoffrey Wilkinson. Fourteen young men each served a two-year term with the IRC, carrying out all the research and a good deal of the negotiation that the Corporation required. Hague and Wilkinson tell us that by the early 1980s there were "two Chairmen and three Chief Executives of major UK companies as well as an MP, the Editor of the UK's leading financial newspaper, the Chief Executive of an investment company and the Director of a major trust and Chairman of the Consumers Association" who had served in the IRC (132). This was action learning with a vengeance.

The key factor is people at the top, both Ministers and civil servants. A peacetime version of the 1939-45 success story would require a recognition that though the Wehrmacht is not at the Channel Ports, the problems facing Britain in the late 1980s and early 1990s are so severe that the luxury of failing to use the country's intellectual capital simply cannot be afforded. It also requires Ministers and senior officials humble enough and brave enough to submit their panaceas and prejudices to gifted, difficult and sometimes quirky people whose greatest virtue is that they are not, in Whitehall's terms, house-trained. They were needed in 1939. They are needed now.

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