

Universities and the Public Service

By THOMAS H. REED

THE term "public service" is so broad as to be ambiguous. It obviously includes several great and easily distinguished classes of service. There is the service rendered by the President, senators, representatives in Congress, cabinet members, governors, state legislators, mayors, and councilmen; they are all certainly engaged in the public service. But no less public and no less serviceable are the activities of those who, without holding office, engage in politics: the whole range of party workers, from the chairmen of the national committees to members of the precinct organizations; and, likewise, all the many citizens who occasionally participate in politics for the purpose of reform—members of city clubs, citizens' leagues, taxpayers' organizations, and so forth. Only a shade removed from this group is that other large class of people who engage in activities that are civic without being political, such as the work of chambers of commerce, park and recreation associations, community chests, and the like. And finally there is the vast appointive personnel of the Federal, state, and local governments, who perform in a professional rather than a representative capacity the actual labor of governing or serving the people.

Much talk about universities and the public service is very vague because of the failure to distinguish between these types of service. It is to the relation of the university to the last category that it is worth while to devote the most attention, for it is at this point that American practice differs most widely from that of the other great Occidental nations. The propor-

tion of college trained men who hold elective political office is probably somewhat lower in the United States than in some European countries. The proportion of university trained men who occupy a dominant place in party organizations is very much lower. This is not due to any fault of the universities; it is due to the fact that American tradition insists that the young men of even our wealthiest families shall undertake some active business or professional career. We have not developed a leisure class in America, free to play at politics. We have had a few examples, of course, of men of this type who have reached eminence in politics—Governor Pinchot, for example, the late Henry Cabot Lodge, the Roosevelts—but these exceptions merely prove the rule. It is unnecessary here to go into the reasons for the weak attractiveness of politics for university men, except to reiterate that it is not the fault of the universities; it is merely part of a general situation.

DETERMINATION OF CIVIC INTEREST

Of course, it may be said that universities might do something to instill into their students a patriotism, a desire to serve, which would counteract this tendency of educated men away from politics. Many experiments in this direction have been tried, but their success has been very moderate. Natural impulses very rarely yield to exhortation except under the immediate eye of the exhorter. There is sometimes complaint of the sterility, the deadening formalism of university instruction in political science; but even the most fascinating of lecturers

who deliberately deal with the vital aspect of government fails to recruit more than a miserable fraction of his students to any real interest in politics. You cannot preach men into patriotism any more than you can preach them into sobriety and virtue. A university should not be expected to atone for the sins of a whole civilization or to make men anything but what the great life currents of the nation tend to make them.

I would not have the universities cease trying to impart a high sense of civic duty to those who pass through their halls. I am only suggesting that we stop blaming the universities for something which is beyond their power to control. So long as men can reach a position of power (even political power) more quickly by getting rich than by accumulating fame for political wisdom, clever and ambitious young men will follow the paths which lead most directly to wealth; and trying to lecture down this tendency will prove as futile as King Canute's command.

An examination of the third category of public servants will show that those who engage in civic but nonpolitical enterprises are of two classes: the volunteer citizen—frequently, though not always, a person who has already attained wealth and distinction in some other walk of life—and those who are professionally employed to carry out the purposes of their respective organizations. The germ of the idea which makes a man interested in parks or in charities, in art museums or in other civic enterprises, not infrequently is implanted in impressionable college days. But on the whole, the determination of this type of civic interest is due to forces which attack a man much later in life. The chamber of commerce, for example, is usually a forum for those who have already attained a place of independent influence in the business world.

The situation is entirely different with the professional servants of civic bodies. They perform for the most part technical or quasi-technical functions for which university training is desirable if not necessary. In many respects they are to be treated from the university-training point of view as belonging to the same class as the civil servants pure and simple, who make up our fourth category. For example, where universities train, as a few do, specifically for public administration, almost as many graduates of such curricula will be found in the employ of civic bodies as in strictly official positions.

THE POLITICAL LEVELING PERIOD

With this brief preliminary survey of other aspects of public service in relation to university training, we are now free to consider training for public service in the narrower sense of training for the civil service; i.e., for the permanent, or "should-be" permanent, service of national, state, and local governments. The oldest university in the United States was founded primarily to train men for public service in this sense. The Johnston Gate at Harvard bears an inscription quoted from *New England's First Fruits* (1643):

After God had carried us safe to *New England*, and wee had builded our houses, provided necessaries for our livelihood, rear'd convenient places for Gods worship and settled the Civill Government; One of the next things we longed for, and looked after was to advance *Learning* and perpetuate it to Posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate Ministry to the Churches, when our present Ministers shall lie in the Dust.

Saving souls from hell was then not a private matter. It was not even merely an industry "affected with a public interest." It was a government undertaking of the first magnitude.

When we separated Church and State, however, we gave up for about a century the direct training of public servants. The very period in which the Jeffersonian doctrine of religious toleration determined that Church and State should each go its own way was a great leveling period in politics. Frontier democracy, which conquered the country to bring about the reign of Andrew Jackson, held one man to be as good as another, and appointive public office a privilege to be passed around as frequently as possible so that as many as possible might participate in the work and the emoluments of government. From the insidious popularity of this doctrine, so flattering to the sensibilities of the ordinary man, we have not even yet wholly recovered, and it still forms the background of resistance to the extension of the merit system as opposed to the spoils system of public employment.

PROFESSIONALIZATION OF GOVERNMENT SERVICE

Any decent college curriculum which causes healthy disillusionment or lays the foundation for the spirit of inquiry helps to undermine this absurd doctrine. Its greatest foe today, however, is the increasingly technical character of government service. One man may be as good as another, but a man who has been trained as a garage mechanic can seldom be expected to serve efficiently as a bacteriologist, a civil engineer, a forester, an agricultural chemist, or any of the thousand and one purely technical jobs which now fall within the scope of government employment. Thus inexorable fact overwhelms the illusions of theory. The very complexity of administration has brought into being a necessary administrative technique which, while not yet so generally recognized as the techniques of the trades, professions,

and pure sciences, is rapidly coming into its own.

Government is no longer the simple thing that it was in the Jacksonian era, when the civil establishment of the United States embraced less than twenty thousand persons. Only in small rural communities with very simple needs can it still be held to be a task for amateurs, and every year sees a decline in the number and the importance of the functions which can be performed even in rural districts by the efforts of volunteers from the locality.

Highways, for example, a hundred years ago were ordinarily constructed and maintained by the work of farmers who assembled in the spring and fall with plows and scrapers, and under the direction of one of their neighbors who had been chosen road overseer, cleaned out the ditches, filled up the ruts, threw some rocks and gravel into the swampy spots, smoothed off a projecting ledge, or removed an obtrusive stump. Theirs was the kind of road that almost any one could build. The modern highway, concrete surfaced, subgraded, and drained, with elaborate bridges and culverts, is an engineering job requiring a great deal of technical skill. Its construction cannot be directed by amateurs. Governmental service is constantly becoming more and more professionalized. Even the politicians cannot prevent the steady march of professionalization.

A further evidence of this tendency is to be found in the enormous multiplication of professional associations. The Public Administration Clearing House has published a *Directory of Organizations in the Field of Public Administration*. It lists 466 national organizations, 65 regional organizations, and 1,131 state organizations. Some of these are purely civic, but the great majority of the state organiza-

tions and a liberal proportion of the national organizations are nothing more than professional organizations of public employees.

Even elective officers have to some extent gone professional; for example, the Ohio Association of Township Trustees and Clerks has perhaps a political motive, but its mere existence tends to create a professional feeling among these minor local officers. At the other end of the scale, such organizations as the American Public Welfare Association, the Municipal Finance Officers' Association, the International City Managers' Association, and the International Association of Chiefs of Police have repeatedly demonstrated their increasingly professional point of view.

OPPORTUNITY FOR UNIVERSITY TRAINING

This growing professionalization of the public service creates the opportunity for university training for the public service. It is possible to provide curricula for the training of young men and women for work which they will never have a chance to perform, but it is impossible to get any considerable number of intelligent young men and women to take such courses. But once a particular type of service becomes a recognized profession, students naturally flow into training courses.

The universities have contributed something, of course, to the professionalizing of the public service. It is their graduates, frequently in their laboratories, that have produced the scientific discoveries which have made government service so largely a technical affair. It is a strange and interesting, if somewhat anomalous, circumstance that professors of science who never gave a thought to government have been the men to do most to undermine the spoils system. The

universities' contribution to the present situation has been indirect; they now have a direct opportunity to take advantage of it.

The largest and most thoroughly professionalized of the technical services of government is, of course, education. With few exceptions, a teacher who has been prepared in one state may, with the satisfaction of minor formalities, secure a teaching position in any part of the Union. The enormous development of schools of education has been coincident with the spread of the idea that teaching is a profession. Undoubtedly the presence in the field of large numbers of highly trained persons whose direct personal advantage is wrapped up in the development of professional ideals, standards, and opportunities has had a good deal to do with the completeness of the result. But we do not have here an example of the old controversy as to which started first, the chicken or the egg. It is perfectly clear that the professionalization of education preceded, if only by a neck, the development of professional training in education.

SURVEYS OF THE SITUATION

Taking advantage of the opportunity which professionalized service offers to the universities has faintly agitated university circles for the past twenty years. A committee of the American Association of University Professors studied the problem in 1912. In 1913 a Committee on Practical Training for Public Service was appointed by the American Political Science Association, consisting of Charles McCarthy, Albert Bushnell Hart, Benjamin F. Shambaugh, W. F. Willoughby, and Raymond G. Gettell, with Edward A. Fitzpatrick as executive secretary. In the course of 1913 the Committee conducted an investi-

gation of practical training for the public service in colleges and universities, and in 1914 held a well-attended conference on the subject in New York.

In 1916 a conference was held at Cincinnati under the auspices of the Association of Urban Universities. Probably the most interesting conference ever held in this field was that on University Training for the National Service at the University of Minnesota in the summer of 1931.¹ In the same year the Committee on Training for the City Manager Profession of the International City Managers' Association made its report.² The Social Science Research Council has a Committee on Public Administration which has shown some interest in the subject of training.

The Committee on Policy of the American Political Science Association has had for the past three years a Subcommittee on Personnel, which has prepared plans for a thorough-going survey of the whole subject of training for the public service. This project has been looked on with favor by some of the foundations, but the effect of the depression on available funds has prevented, so far, any financial support for it. However, the Committee is arranging to get as much of the work as possible done by voluntary coöperation among political scientists in anticipation of funds being ultimately forthcoming to complete the task.

COURSES OFFERED

On the whole, however, very little has been accomplished toward the specific training of students for public employment, outside the field of educa-

tion. A few universities have established courses definitely intended to train for various aspects of public administration. Public libraries recruit their staffs, of course, very extensively from the product of the university schools of library science. In the neighborhood of twenty colleges and universities have established curricula intended to train men for the foreign service. As Professor Anderson says, "This field of work illustrates the willingness of institutions to offer specialized training when attractive positions are open to competitive examination."³ In fact, it is probable that already many more people are being trained for the foreign service than can be absorbed by it.

A dozen universities offer a course leading to a degree in public health, but without attracting any large number of students, presumably because there is not a single definite examination to prepare for, as in the case of the foreign service. Schools of forestry and agriculture as a rule closely correlate their work with the needs of the national, state, and local governments in these fields.

On the other hand, university curricula in pure science, engineering, and law as a rule make little attempt to meet the specific requirements of public administration. Some attention is paid in engineering colleges to municipal engineering and sanitation, and of course considerable attention is devoted to road building.

Law schools do practically nothing specific to fit their graduates for positions in the public service, although the need for what Professor Anderson calls public lawyers with a definite social as well as legal training is very great. Several universities offer special curricula in public administration,

¹ See the proceedings of the conference, *University Training for the National Service*, University of Minnesota Press, 1932.

² *City Manager Yearbook, 1932*, pp. 226-31. See also pp. 165-80.

³ *University Training for the National Service*, p. 16.

in most instances designed to fit candidates for state and local service. Such curricula are to be found in the universities of Michigan, Syracuse, Cincinnati, Princeton, California, Northwestern (with special reference to police service), and Chicago (with special reference to police administration and public personnel work).

PRACTICAL TRAINING REQUIRED

That more has not been done by universities in the direction of such specific training need not, however, be regarded as an unmixed evil. Indeed, it has perhaps been a blessing in disguise, for the most significant testimony offered in the report of the Minnesota conference was that of several representatives of those branches of the national administration which make the most use of college graduates, to the effect that they did not want the universities to give more specific training but a broader general education—a basic training, of course, in the science or art required in the particular field of administration, and a general education in which the social sciences should be emphasized. It seems to be the consensus of opinion of those best qualified to know, that specific training in the details of any of the techniques involved in public administration should be a training on the job or at least should be pursued concurrently with actual official service.

This has been clearly recognized in the attempts at training for municipal administration which have been made in this country. The training school of the old New York Bureau of Municipal Research mingled academic training with practical experience. The University of Michigan's master's degree in municipal administration has been awarded only after at least three months' practical experience following the completion of the academic portion

of the curriculum. At Syracuse, for the last part of the course, the administration of a neighboring city has been employed as a laboratory. At the University of Cincinnati, students work alternate periods in the classroom and in city offices.

These are merely examples of the variety of ways in which academic and practical training can be combined, and they serve to indicate the extent to which universities must be prepared to cooperate with national, state, and local administrative authorities in training for the public service. Just as a young doctor must go through the experience of an internship in a hospital, and a newly admitted member of the bar must serve for some time as an apprentice in an office, before they can become successful practitioners of their respective arts, so a university graduate entering the public service must extend his period of education within the service if he is to become a fully qualified civil servant.

Of course, the stage of academic preparation at which the student should enter the civil service will vary with the subject matter involved, but whether he enters as only a bachelor of arts, a master of arts, or a doctor of philosophy, a period of practical training will be necessary to the completion of his education.

THE ENGLISH METHOD

A great deal of controversy has raged around the English method of recruiting the higher civil service by means of competitive examinations based upon the normal course of study in the English universities. It is scarcely to be denied that this system has placed too much emphasis upon mere scholastic proficiency in the classics and in mathematics. Modern languages and history with difficulty won place in the system, and it is only

in relatively recent years that the social sciences such as economics and political science have received any recognition whatever.

The English have been content to draw into the service what examination could demonstrate to be the best product of their educational system. There can be no doubt that the type of examination, coupled with the keenness of competition, has resulted in cramming, in stuffing the youthful mind with vast quantities of useless information. For who will not admit that the classics, mathematics, and philosophy, when they cease to be pursued for humanistic ends and become merely the means of obtaining an administrative job, quite lose their virtue? From a British writer I take this mordant criticism of the British system:

Learning is pumped into young men at the universities for three or four years under tremendously high pressure . . . until their foreheads bulge, their ears stand out and, in some cases, even their Adam's apples protrude. Naturally the young men become a little dizzy toward the end; a little top-heavy; also, in some cases, a little mad. . . .

Then, suddenly, they are all herded into a hall at the back of the Royal Academy in London, and the cork is taken out. For several days on end the contents of their swollen brains spurt forth in an absolute torrent. . . .

It is by this system, roughly speaking, that our real rulers are chosen for us. . . . It will be years before they recover. . . . From the date when he receives his first appointment until the age of about forty, the average Higher Division Civil Servant is, and is expected to be, little more than a husk. . . . Then, however, a change takes place. . . . Just as a plant or an animal may eventually develop characteristics which will enable it to live in unnatural surroundings, so these former young men, these recent husks, will gradually be found to have evolved—no, not another brain, for that was utterly destroyed in the hall at

the back of the Royal Academy, but a synthetic nodule, a strange, hard, artificial something, a small, leathery what-not, which, rattling about inside their otherwise empty skulls, has contrived to direct not only their several functions, but through these the lives and fortunes of countless fellow creatures almost all over the face of the habitable globe.⁴

In spite of the evils of the English method of recruiting the higher civil service (and after all, universities are interested only in training for the higher service) it has on the whole, as methods of recruitment go, been highly successful. It has brought into the service a fair share of the cleverest young men whom the universities turn out, and they have exhibited a really remarkable adaptability to the responsibilities which have been placed upon them.

If the plan suggested for this country were adopted, and university training for the public service were to consist of a basic or elementary training in the particular field of knowledge to be pursued, plus a good general education in which the social sciences, including a knowledge of the history and development of human society and those institutions of government and administration which it has evolved, were emphasized, we might be in a fair way to secure the advantages without the disadvantages of the English system. The great extent of the country, and the fact that there would be not only various branches of the national service but also corresponding branches of state and local service for which separate examinations would be held, would obviate that concentrated competition which is perhaps the worst feature of the English system. And, on the other hand, the emphasis upon the social sciences, which directly

⁴ Mackail, Denis, *The Square Circle*, 1931, pp. 268-70.

contribute to a real understanding of modern society, its problems, and its instrumentalities, would vitalize training at the point where English practice has its most sterilizing effect.

RESEARCH

Universities contribute to the public service not merely by training men for public and quasi-public employment, but also by the direct results of research.⁵ As has already been pointed out, university research in a wide range of subjects has had a direct effect upon the development of public administration, and the universities of today are more and more organizing research with direct reference to its utility to government. In fact, by far the greater part of what can properly be called research in the field of government and administration is being carried on in this country by members of the faculties of American universities.

This does not mean that the greater part of the activities to which the name of research is often somewhat carelessly applied are so carried on. The bureaus of governmental or municipal research maintained by universities fall far short—in number, financial support, and at least quantitative productivity—of the standard set by the independent bureaus of research. But most of the work which is done by these independent agencies, with a few exceptions, is not, strictly speaking, research. It is merely the application of research to specific problems.

Furthermore, the activities of state and municipal reference libraries, while extremely useful, seldom go deeper than the compilation of data from obvious and easily available sources of information. Outside of the univer-

sities, the most impressive results of organized research have been obtained by the Institute of Public Administration, now definitely associated with Columbia University, and the Brookings Institution, which, while it has given up granting degrees, still, with its numerous fellowships, approximates many of the conditions of a first-rate graduate school.

Striking results also have been accomplished through the activity of the International Association of Chiefs of Police in promoting the study of Uniform Crime Reporting, and by the National Committee on Municipal Standards, which, in coöperation with associations of officials in the field of public works, has developed systems of uniform cost record keeping in public works. The Bureau of Public Personnel Administration, promoted by the Civil Service Assembly, also has done good work.

When full account has been taken of the results of what we may call organized research as distinguished from the personal research of university professors, it is after all from the latter source that the most important progress is to be expected. Genuine research is after all a personal matter—an individual pursuing to the bottom a subject which stirs his imagination. There is little doubt that universities could contribute more to the cause of research in public administration by releasing the time of qualified scholars to pursue the subjects that interest them than in any other way. In fact, the most successful independent agencies, such as the Institute of Public Administration and the Brookings Institution, have done some of their best work by this method.

The place of pure research must always largely be in the universities, and the universities will do well to encourage it, because it is around this

⁵ For excellent summaries of this subject see, L. D. White, *Trends in Public Administration* (1933), Ch. XXII, and F. A. Ogg, *Research in the Humanistic and Social Sciences* (1928), *passim*.

growing body of knowledge that the inner life of a university centers. If the universities will allow mature scholars time for research and give them the facilities for the work in the form of special libraries, clerical and other assistance, and (for some types of research) mechanical equipment, they will be doing their best by public administration.

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