

house. I don't attach all that importance to national independence, but if we are not acceptable as part of a larger trading unit, I see great advantage in going it alone. We've done it before and if we had the courage, we could do it again.

"Unilateral free trade provides the same *kind* of benefit that would be given by membership of the Common Market—large-scale operations and a shake-up for that part of industry cosily cocooned in cottonwool. The benefits would clearly be different in degree. The shake-up of industries whose price structure is protected by high tariffs would be more violent—and a good job too. The scale of possible operation would be smaller—that's a pity—but it would be larger than the scale obtaining today.

"Unilateral free trade would give us cheaper imports, hence a lower cost of living, reduced manufacturing costs and more competitive exports. A free market made us prosperous once and there is no basic change in underlying realities that would prevent us from repeating the experience. What holds us back are the rigidities that have developed as a result of more than fifty years of devices to prevent inefficient producers from feeling uncomfortable.

"I would advocate an immediate abolition of all tariffs. A gradual removal sounds attractive, but really, if there is plaster to pull off, it is best done quickly. Simultaneously we should have to adopt a more flexible exchange-rate policy. No doubt it is in our interest to maintain the internal value of our currency so that we can borrow at a lower rate than if the value is being continually eroded. But there is no more powerful reason for exchange parities of the 1940s to be perpetuated than there is for the relative price of lead and zinc to be immutable.

"I don't expect to find an awful lot of people rallying to my free-trade banner—but even in Whitehall there are more than you think."

Managing the Ministers

By P. R. HUDSON

IT HAS often been claimed that in Britain the only truly professional politicians are civil servants. There are two good reasons for this; first, the elected representative is desperately short of factual information, apart from that provided for him on request; secondly both when in power or in opposition, he frequently lacks the right kind of research facilities to help him do his homework.

There are some Members of Parliament who are quite content with present arrangements, but for those who like to form opinions and make decisions in the light of objective analysis, the relationship between elected Members and the permanent civil servants is not satisfactory.

The 16,000 word proof of evidence to the Fulton Committee on the Civil Service submitted by the Labour Party put forward some strong recommendations for re-

forming the service. No doubt much of this evidence has been coloured by impressions gained from relatively new Labour Members of Parliament on how the civil service works. In many cases Members may be resentful about the apparent resources of knowledge that the civil servants may call on to refute suggestions or slow up procedures when it appears to suit them. It is clear from the proof of evidence that all is not well.

In one passage reference is made to the "enormous amount of work which goes on in a department of which the Minister knows nothing . . . some of it deliberately concealed from him . . . this secrecy which makes Ministers the tools of their departments . . ." Since it appears that nearly all ministerial contact with departments is channelled through the Permanent Secretaries, the influence of these men must be considerable, both within their departments and in the formulation of policies. It has been claimed, for example, that where the "departmental point of view" runs contrary to a Minister's aims obstacles of insurmountable difficulty appear out of nowhere, or else the Minister is "blinded with science" in a form which he cannot grasp or see through.

One of the main problems, of course, is that the scope of government management of the nation's affairs has grown to such an extent that it is extremely difficult for an MP to lift himself above the interminable procedural wrangles to look at problems in a clear, simple manner. The truly great issues of politics are concerned with simple principles—not with management and administrative procedures. It must be very difficult, however, for Members to adopt a "man-in-the-street" approach to problems when at every turn there are professional advisers telling them that "it cannot be done like that." In the final analysis Ministers must decide whether or not this or that policy is worth supporting. From the evidence submitted by the Labour Party it would appear that they are not always well equipped to do this.

Reading the evidence, one tends to wonder for example, whether those MPs who answer letters on site-value rating have ever thought out the issues themselves, or whether they have blindly accepted a draft or a brief prepared for them by someone else who also has an incomplete grasp of the subject or who, for one reason or another, has with-held vital information. From some of the correspondence received this would seem to be probable.

In the last resort, MPs must think for themselves, and simplify issues down to "desert island" situations. To help see the wood instead of the trees, two things are necessary: a simplified system of calling in expert advice quickly—the best that is available—and a determination to question the fundamental principles of everything they read. It would be a help to all concerned if politicians of all parties would resolve to be honest with themselves, their colleagues and those that question them. Evasion will never bring respect but honesty can reap rewards on both sides of the Permanent Secretaries' desks.