

# Sabotage From Whitehall

THE Civil Service exercises enormous powers in blocking changes of policy, states a former Conservative Minister, Nicholas Ridley, MP, in *Industry and the Civil Service*\* published on November 7. This may well have been one of the reasons why this Government has found it so difficult to unscramble some of the problems it inherited, such as State ownership of industry.

"To achieve greater influence over industry is an important and major goal of Civil Service policy," says Mr. Ridley, former Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

In its resistance to change, he states, the British Civil Service "is like an enormous steel spring; it can be pulled out of its natural position by great exertion, but it eventually pulls you back by its sheer persistence.

"Thus, towards the middle and end years of each Government some of the same policies begin to appear, whatever the reforming, even crusading, nature of the incoming Government. Undermined by the system, exhausted by the work load, battered by events, they relax their pull upon the string, and are pulled back themselves to the position the Civil Service always wanted."

"We have reached the point where half the gross national product is controlled by the State. Is it wise," he asks, "to leave such a large slice of our lives in the hands of a Civil Service whose traditions are conservative and whose organisation is monolithic?"

Mr. Ridley says industry has come more and more within the sway of "the gentleman in Whitehall."

"Control of industry is not unacceptable to the Civil Service.

Industrial companies are large accretions of economic power, and they are the providers of jobs, exports, investment and taxable profits. These are all things that the dedicated and worthy civil servant wants to bring forth in abundance 'in the national interest'."

Instead of seeing industry as a series of companies providing goods or services to meet customers' needs, the civil servant sees it as a series of "institutions". "He tends to make the mistake that the Communists make. He likes to work out how many tons of coal or how many milling machines, supermarkets or hotels will be necessary five or ten years hence. The 'industry' must then be pressurised into providing the required capacity. He is usually wrong in his forecast, but by then he is sponsoring some other industry, and nobody is much interested."

The effect of Civil Service control is most evident in the nationalized industries. Relations become too close between the head of the sponsoring department and the chairman of the board. Nationalized industries "are more like Departments of State than industrial concerns."

Civil servants waste money and resources on forcing industry to finance a research association, or in backing some new technique or invention that has caught their fancy.

Mr. Ridley says the everyday work and attitude of a Government Department is often more responsive to its Permanent Secretary than to its Ministers. "A good Under Secretary can persist unobtrusively but firmly with policies his political masters may wish to change. The whole machine is alerted to thwart Ministers who resist Official advice.

Parliament, he states, is seen by Whitehall as "a hostile ordeal

which can occasionally mar their plans . . . . Public opinion sometimes obstinately interferes with the policies which Whitehall knows to be best for the public."

He suggests strengthening the power and authority of Departmental Ministers by giving them the right to choose a loyal "cabinet" of advisers; separating the functions of policy making from administration and taking both away from Whitehall's direct control; and appointing a permanent Commission which would identify those areas suitable for hiving off and make public recommendations to that effect.

## MARBLE HALLS ON GOLDEN GROUND

AN *Evening Standard* correspondent, October 31, says he understands that a single tenant has been found for Leadenhall House in the City at a rent around £2½ million a year or £23 a square foot excluding rates.

The block has all mod. cons. and includes Norwegian granite elevations and walls lined with marble and mirrors.

Not many people have this kind of money or can afford such luxurious accommodation. The offices must have been let to a fellow developer.

## HEALTHY DUCKS SEEK AID

AN editorial from the *Commercial Grower*, October 12, 1973 says: "There is at present great confidence within the horticultural industry and if we are to maintain our high productive efficiency we must have the same confident assurances from the Government. We must tell EEC to drop dragging its feet on our proposals for the new Farm and Horticultural development grants, and we must make it clear that any such schemes under this EEC directive are meant to aid a modern viable industry and not a largely peasant one."

Modern and viable—what, after all, could be a better justification for national assistance.

\* *Industry and the Civil Service*. Nicholas Ridley, MP; Aims of Industry; 15p.