

IVORY TO REPLACE BRASS?

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In his contribution to *Agenda 1970*,¹ Professor Hodgetts makes an eloquent plea for counter-measures designed to ensure that governments "will not be viewed, or view themselves, as the ultimate repositories of all knowledge." To this end, he advocates establishment of an academic source of knowledge to serve as countervailing power to the accumulated knowledge of the bureaucracy.

In his judgment "democracies require countervailing knowledge centres that will provide full and intelligent discussion, without detracting from the ultimate authority of our responsible governing organs to make the ultimate choices." He asserts that public power centres are growing, that their needs for knowledge have undergone a dramatic expansion and that the traditional policy of "buying" such knowledge by direct recruitment will not meet these needs. He observes that, in a democratic society knowledge should not in any event be monopolized by the bureaucracy. He is careful to indicate the usefulness of the advisory body as an instrument for establishing communication links between the public served by public servants and the actual or potential centres of knowledge existing outside public agencies but warns against the danger of such advisory bodies becoming overly cosy clubs, "restricted to an inner circle of establishment or near-establishment participants"

Professor Hodgetts also cites the royal commission as a transmitter of knowledge and points to its weaknesses, especially in the "new-model" commission, as an apparatus for applied research. He does concede that these latter-day commissions have come to grips with two important realities, (a) the need for multi-disciplinary team effort in applied policy research and (b) the value of overcoming the problem of the isolation of our scholarly community which is scattered in packets across a continental domain. Finally he explores other ways of facilitating development of "independent centres of countervailing knowledge on policy issues" and suggests as possible methods government endowment of a number of applied policy research institutes attached to universities or alternatively endowment of a single, privately governed Foundation for

*The views expressed herein are my private and personal reflections as a student of public administration and quite independent of my association with the Canada Council.

¹T. Lloyd and J. McLeod, *Agenda 1970: Proposals for a creative politics*, The University League for Social Reform, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968.

Applied Policy Research which would allocate funds to task forces prepared and equipped to undertake long-term research.

If one accepts his premise of the need for "countervailing knowledge," the argument presented in his paper is most persuasive. However, the problem of knowledge and the public interest can, I believe, be viewed in a somewhat different perspective.

It is possible to argue that the key requirement, in these times of rapid change and increasing complexity of social organization, is to make sure that the political elite and the bureaucracy at all levels of government possess the knowledge needed to cope with policy problems. The "systems" model providing inspiration for such a line of thinking would be the dynamic, cybernetic type as advocated by Deutsch in *The Nerves of Government* and elsewhere rather than the more limited input-output model of David Easton. We need an "information system" which enhances the chances of the political system being adaptive and capable of innovation. One need not be especially perceptive to recognize that knowledge and techniques tend to become obsolete very quickly nowadays and that therefore we need in the country at large and in the bureaucracy in particular an awareness of the necessity for constant renewal and, what is perhaps more important, a pre-disposition to innovation.

Viewed in that perspective, one might find the case for countervailing centres of knowledge weak. Given the pressing need for the optimum generation and application of new, creative ideas, a stronger case could be made for *complementary* sources of knowledge which does not mean that academic research endeavour should necessarily be guided by matters of immediate social and political concern. Professor Hodgetts' case rests essentially on a combination of the Baconian dictum that knowledge is power and the Actonian that power tends to corrupt. One could say that there is no need for *countervailing* centres of knowledge (and therefore power) because politicians and bureaucrats do not have enough knowledge in their own centres to overwhelm with that knowledge. Knowledge is not the well-spring of political power and bureaucracy can still survive when relatively ignorant. One might also suggest that it is more in the public interest that politicians and public servants be "with it" than that the stage be set for possible power struggles within the "knowledge industry." For me the case for substantial support of university-based research is better made along traditional lines of the values and virtues of free and independent enquiry and the generally conceded advantages of the investment in human resources. To plead for the establishment of direct government endowment of applied policy research at university institutes, for example, is at worst to invite the abridgment of academic freedom against which scholars have always legitimately fought and at best to channel an unwarranted amount of

intellectual energy into what would amount to little more than steady contract work for "research entrepreneurs."

By this I do not mean to imply, as Professor Hodgetts seems to, that a distinction should be made in the social sciences between pure and applied research. Such a distinction would be hard to maintain. Even if such a line could be drawn, the attempt to do so might prove to be basically "unscientific" and wasteful. After all, much of the scholarly enquiry and speculation in the humanities and social sciences (the term "moral philosophy" is used to cover most of this) which has stood the test of time was "mission oriented" and had applied policy implications. Aristotle, Locke, Bodin, Comte, Marx are cases in point. Nor do I suggest that academic researchers keep away from public dialogue about policy issues. There is no reason why academics should be political eunuchs. Let researchers be as "engagés" as they like. Perhaps indeed there is no such thing as value-free research in the social sciences.

The important thing in my view is that researchers conduct the research they really want to do. Where research projects are conceived in a free context that is, where the researchers set out "to do their thing," funds should be available within budgetary limits from grant-giving agencies for proposals which can pass the test of endorsement by the applicants' scholarly peers after objective assessment of the research planned. Applications for grants earmarked for free research are not to be turned down because of the projects' potential policy implications. If the needs of a contracting agency or department and the genuine research interests of a university researcher happen to coincide, there is no reason to suppose that his work will necessarily be any less beneficial to the scholarly community.

But for university researchers to set out to create a sort of "shadow bureaucracy" would, I think, be a mistake that could prove to be quite dysfunctional, to use current social science jargon. It might seriously cripple or distort scholarly endeavour; it might cause the bureaucracy to atrophy; it might at any rate influence public servants to consider themselves "doers" and the academics "thinkers." (Of course, no serious public servant would think it responsible to put himself entirely under the dominion of even the most brilliant of the university teachers and researchers.)

What we most need from the universities is a greater output of well-trained graduates, especially those taking advanced degrees. Perhaps university teachers should put appreciably more emphasis on teaching. Otherwise there will not be enough well-trained people around to replace them and to staff the other institutional orders. I fully realize that doing research conduces to making a professor a more inspiring teacher and that the presence of high quality research activity in a department usually helps foster a generally stimulating atmosphere for students and

faculty. I am also conscious that there is an enormous amount of research to be done on specifically Canadian topics. Thus, with Canadian public administration, despite the sterling work of Hodgetts and a few others, there would be precious little that is fresh and up-to-date to teach without professors' association with the Glassco or B & B Commissions or current research.

But research with a capital R is apparently becoming a status symbol and there is danger that "grantsmanship" could become a serious pre-occupation. No one would deny university men the prestige that should flow from high quality research but it would clearly not be in the public interest to create structures which would divert their attention from university life and make them keen to administer departments by remote control. The essential thing is that the requisite knowledge be brought to bear on a particular problem or range of problems at an appropriate time. If the channels between Canada's public service, universities and industry and also of course the vast pool of world sources of knowledge are kept open, the chances are that the public interest will be well served.

I see little value in "countervailing knowledge." Indeed, the probability is great that in many instances we do not have enough knowledge. It is the cross-fertilization of ideas from various sources and the responsiveness of the political system to the infusion of new ideas and new definitions of the situation that are essential. University men will get credit for the contributions we all expect them to make, but the most creative ideas are not likely to be nurtured in the "hot house" atmosphere of applied policy research institutes. Incidentally, university professors are not the sole "custodians" of knowledge outside government.

The place where high competence for tackling tough policy questions should be constantly developed is within the bureaucracy itself. Having worked for a "new-model" royal commission, I can easily agree with Professor Hodgetts about their weaknesses and strengths. But my conclusion is that the public service of the 1970s should be so staffed that royal commissions become obsolete or are reserved for really extraordinary probes. The public service should buy by direct recruitment on a long-term or short-term basis almost all the expertise it requires for the research and analysis basic to meaningful decision making, "for where the course is not known the effect cannot be produced." We cannot continue to stumble from problem to problem by calling on royal commissions. In my judgment, at least half of the royal commissions appointed in the last ten years were asked to do work which a high-powered bureaucracy with enough depth, especially in terms of the absolute number of research personnel, in the various departments could have handled. The Glassco and Laurendeau-Dunton Commissions are notable exceptions.

It is not suggested that there would be no need for outside advisers.

Instead, there would be qualified staff in a better position to decide whether and when to seek advice and how to evaluate it. But, contrary to what is currently urged in some quarters regarding the natural sciences, I strongly advocate predominantly in-house or at least in-service social science research connected with aspects of departmental programs, taken singly or in various combinations. It is silly to grope around while waiting for wisdom to pour forth from the universities and similar outside sources. (My remarks are not meant to apply to advisory bodies performing *adjudicating* functions regarding research grants, etc.) Advocacy of high quality sustained in-house research within departments does not negate the need for a comprehensive grasp by Parliament and the executive of the direction of government-sponsored and government-conducted applied policy research and the establishment of whatever priorities might be deemed necessary. A great deal of such research activity could be done in the framework of some kind of science policy. But this is a different thing from telling academic researchers what they *ought* to be doing research on.

Part of Hodgetts' analysis which I find closer to my bias is the suggestion of an exchange of knowledge between public and private centres. Development of what he calls "a working partnership" between such centres might be the best way to effect such an exchange. Whether there be very formal channels or not, it is clear that there has to be constant contact between specialists from government, university, business and other circles.

One way to assure a workable minimum of contacts would be to establish a deliberate exchange program or make provision for easy movement on a self-selection basis between these groups. I am impressed by the findings and recommendations of the Fulton Committee concerning the British Civil Service,² also by the role that Theodore White notes "action intellectuals" as playing in several United States administrations. Perhaps in the course of their careers some academics might decide as a civic contribution to bring their knowledge to the direct service of the public though the price be a compromise between their deep academic research interests and a specific set of policy problems. Others might be prompted to join the public service for a short or long term out of a sense of commitment to a particular program or a policy orientation. Details like portable pensions could help, but the "openness" of the various hierarchies would have to be influenced mostly by the state of mind.

I find the idea of a Foundation for Applied Policy Research attractive but wonder whether we might not more usefully consider the Fulton Committee's notion of a Civil Service College which would include a

²Cmd. 3638 (1968).

powerful research component.³ The staff and students of such a college could be drawn from the public service, the universities and business and find there an ideal place for the meeting of minds. Bureaucrats would derive immense benefit from sabbatical stints as students, teachers or researchers in universities. In the course of such retreading, any illusions about monopoly of knowledge would be quickly dissipated.

That brings me back to Hodgetts' central argument which, although persuasive, is one that I am reluctant to accept as a datum. It is indeed a plausible hypothesis that the accretion of knowledge in the bureaucracy is at a point where counterbalancing measures have to be adopted to hold it in check, but it is only a hypothesis and needs to be checked. It would be interesting to see how many top specialists in various disciplines and professions are in the public service. It would also be instructive to learn, on the basis even of very impressionistic studies, whether the public servants among such specialists really possess manifestly superior knowledge, as distinct from departmental folklore, to that possessed by experts outside the public service. My guess is that, as things now stand, ignorance rather than overwhelming knowledge would be the basis for the "Jack-in-office" not realizing when he is being a little tyrant.

To hold bureaucracy in check and monitor the executive apparatus, what we require, I think, is adequate Parliamentary supervision of delegated legislation and ombudsman-type institutions. Such bodies would no doubt be all the more effective with the knowledgeable assistance of independent, wise and thoughtful people from the universities, business and other centres of knowledge and power outside the public service. But it is *political* machinery that I envisage, not the device of counter-vailing academic power.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 35-40.