

SCIENCE

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REORGANIZATION OF THE WORK OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT¹

THERE is one problem of the new administration that has received the attention and thought of the organized engineers of America for many years past. This is the problem of the reorganization of the federal government. The inadequacy, the wastefulness, and the inefficiency of our federal organization was evident enough under pre-war conditions. These inadequacies, these inefficiencies, these wastes were exhibited to the country during the war at the cost of millions.

Congress has placed the problem in the hands of a very able congressional joint committee. But if this joint committee succeeds in securing the imminently necessary results it will only be by full insistent support to it by public opinion. Many attempts have been made at reorganization before but all of them have gone to the same crematory—the interminable differences in opinion among the executive and legislative officials over details.

To any student of federal organization, one sweeping and fundamental necessity stands out above all others, and that is that the administrative units of the government must be re-grouped so as to give each of the great departments more nearly a single purpose. The hodge-podge of aims in certain administrative branches is scarcely believable when we consider our national pride and skill in organization. Such functions as public domain, public works, assistance to veterans, public health functions, aids to navigation, to industry, to trade, purchasing of major supplies, are each and every one scattered over from four to eight departments, most of which are devoted to some other major purpose.

¹ Summary of an address by Mr. Herbert Hoover, made at the dinner given in his honor by the Engineers' Club of Philadelphia, April 16.

Economies can be accomplished from a public point of view by an elimination of the overlap in these different units of administration through unification into groups of similar purpose. The real economy to the nation, however, does not lie here, however great this may be, but it lies in their more effective functioning in their daily relation to the public. The extra cost imposed upon business in general in the determination of the relation of any particular business to the different functions of the government, with the unnecessarily duplicating interferences and demands is a real charge on national wealth, probably as great in some directions as the actual costs of the administrations themselves.

Of equal importance with economy is to secure effective concentration of government effort into service to the community. No constructive vision or policies can be built around a national service directed by from two to ten cabinet members, more especially when this particular purpose is a side issue to all of them. No better example of this exists than the deplorable handling of our relations to our veterans.

There are other reasons that render reorganization imperative. The changed economic situation of the world demands that the functions of the government in aid to commerce and industry be given more concentration and wider scope.

The enlarged activities of the government as a result of the war greatly affect certain departments. The Treasury to-day as the fiscal office of the government must handle an annual budget of \$5,000,000,000 as compared with \$1,000,000,000 pre-war. Activities of the Army have increased from a budget of \$200,000,000 to \$400,000,000; activities of the Navy have increased from a budget of \$125,000,000 to \$425,000,000. Thus the burden and responsibilities for the major purposes of these departments have been enormously increased. I believe it is the consensus of opinion of the gentlemen conducting these departments that in the interests of efficiency they should not be called to responsibility for

the administration of at least some of the matters not pertinent to their major functions which clutter their departments.

We have also some confusion between executive, advisory, and semi-judicial functions. One of the tendencies of government both local and national during the last twenty years has been to add executive functions to commissions and boards created primarily for advisory or regulatory purposes. It requires no argument with our business public that the executive functions can not rise to high efficiency in the hands of government boards where from the very nature of things each member has a separate responsibility to the public and is primarily engaged in a semi-judicial function.

Furthermore, during the last few years there has been a great growth of independent agencies in the government reporting directly to the president until his office is overburdened almost beyond the point of endurance. The original and sound conception was that the executive functions should be reported up to the president directly through his cabinet officials. Not only do these outside functions to-day overburden the president, but they render coordination with executive departments extremely difficult. It is neither possible nor advisable to place all these outside organizations into the departments, but much could be done to mitigate the situation.

One of the great steps in federal reorganization is the erection of a budget system, with its necessary reorganization of the congressional committees. There can be no doubt as to the early accomplishment of this great reform, but it will not serve its real purpose until the departments have been reorganized so that they represent a common purpose. Without this, congress will never have before it budgets showing the expenditure of the government in its relation to any particular function.

I have daily evidence in the Department of Commerce of all these forces. The question of governmental aids to navigation is not by any means one of the principal functions of our government, but it must be a sore trial

to the hardy mariner. He must obtain his domestic charts from the Department of Commerce, his foreign charts from the Navy Department, and his nautical almanac from the Naval Observatory—and he will in some circumstances get sailing directions from the Army. In a fog he may get radio signals from both the Navy and Commerce, and listen to fog horns and look for lights and buoys provided him by Commerce; if he sinks his life is saved by the Treasury. He will anchor at the direction of the Army, who rely upon the Treasury to enforce their will. His boilers and lifeboats are inspected by the Department of Commerce; his crew is certified by one bureau in commerce, signed off in the presence of another, and inspected at sailing by the Treasury, and on arrival by the Department of Labor.

It is possible to relate the same sort of story in our governmental relations to industry to our domestic and foreign commerce.

The moral of all this is that economy could be made by placing most of these functions under one head, not only economy to the government but to the mariner. Congress would know what it spends in aid to navigation and the government could develop definite policies in giving proper assistance and lastly could remove from the hardy mariner's mind his well-founded contempt for the government as a business organization.

The economic changes in the world, growing out of the war, and their reflex upon our trade and industry make it vital if we are to maintain our standards of living against increasing ferocity of competition that we shall concentrate and enlarge our national effort in the aid, protection, stimulation and perfection of our industrial and commercial life. There can be no real Department of Commerce or commercial policies to these broad purposes so long as the instrumentalities of the government bearing on these questions lie in half a dozen departments.

We want no paternalism in government. We do need in government aid to business in a collective sense. In a department we do not want to either engage in business or to

regulate business. We need a department that can give prompt and accurate diagnosis from both a foreign and domestic point of view of economic events, of economic tendencies; of economic ills; that can promptly and accurately survey economic opportunity, economic discrimination and opposition; that can give scientific advice and assistance and stability to industry in furnishing it with prompt and accurate data upon production, supplies and consumption; that can cooperate with it in finding standards and simplifications; that can by broad study promote national conversation in industry and the elimination of waste; that can study and ventilate the commercial side of our power possibilities; that can study and advise national policies in development of rail, water and overseas transportation; that, in fact covers, so far as government functions can cover, the broad commercial problems of trade, industry and transportation. This can be accomplished more by coordination of existing governmental facilities than by increased expenditures.

THE AMERICAN ENGINEERING COUNCIL¹

IN these days when societies multiply and increase it is a fair question to ask whether there is need for such an organization as the Federated American Engineering Societies. That many believe there is such a need is attested by the large number of societies that have already joined the organization and by the promise that others will come in. Aside from this, however, it is well to clear our minds as to just what the aims of this organization may be and what it may hope to accomplish. I am not unmindful of the vast amount of useful work that has been done by individual engineering societies in this country, not only in the somewhat varied lines for

¹ Address by Dexter S. Kimball, dean of the college of engineering of Cornell University and vice-president of the American Engineering Council, at the dinner given by the Engineers' Club of Philadelphia, April 16, in honor of Mr. Herbert Hoover.