

COUNCILLORS AND OFFICIALS AT WORK

by Councillor P.R.B.Lewis, C.A.(S.A.), M.P.C.

1

The words of the last verse of a poem by Robert Burns are known to most of us. Translated into English they would read something like this -

"Oh would some power grant us the gift to see ourselves as others see us.

It would from many a blunder and foolish notion free us.

What airs in gait and dress would leave us at evening devotions."

How many of us know the rest of the poem? Or its theme? It is called "To a Louse - on seeing one on a lady's bonnet in Church"

The lady is dressed in her finery, and is very proud of her new bonnet. She takes her seat hoping to attract the approving glances of her fellow worshippers. She sits down, but it is not long before those seated behind her in Church are more aware of the goings-on of the louse as it moves about the lace and trimmings of her bonnet, and how strange it seems to the congregation that a louse should be on the hat of so fine a lady. Many had their attention so distracted by the louse that their concentration on worship was destroyed.

"Oh Jenny don't toss your head
And set your beauties all abroad
You little know what cursed speed
The wretch is making."

2

I think that those engaged in civic affairs often take themselves too seriously. Councillors, having survived an Election, rightly feel they are chosen by the people to represent them, and due to what I often find is embarrassing deference to Councillors by Officials, can only picture themselves (like the lady in Church) in their new bonnet, often unaware of their shortcomings, as there must be, as it is impossible for any one to be wise about as many things as those on which Councillors have to give weighty judgements. Too many Councillors consider them-

selves experts on too many subjects too soon.

Officials often develop an insular attitude, and because of the traditional methods of promotion, of salary grades, of cynicism to Councillors who come and go, often get themselves into a groove, and again, like the lady with the bonnet, are unaware of the image they present to the looker-on.

There has been no more critical observer of these matters than Professor Parkinson. It may help us in standing back and looking at ourselves if we take heed of what Parkinson has to say.

Parkinson states that he discovered his first Law during World War II. The Law is that 'work expands to fill the time available for its completion, and administrators multiply by a law of growth irrespective of the work, if any, they are supposed to do. General recognition of this fact is shown in the proverbial phrase "it is the busiest man who has time to spare".

DELETE from the paper given to the Institute of Treasurers paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4.

AFTER paragraph 11 add new paragraph -

Not only do officials make work for each other, but the three-tiered structure of central, provincial and local authorities makes work for officials. I don't want to elaborate this in detail, but would suggest that we pause to consider whether or not a lot of red tape could be cut. Are not matters for instance which require the decision we shall say of the Bantu Administration Department sorely delayed because it first has to be dealt with by a Local Bantu Commissioner who then writes to an Area Bantu Commissioner, who then writes to Head Office, and the reply has to come back through the same tortuous route. Could more authority not be given to Local Authorities instead of having to get approval for all sorts of trivial matters, or must the cumbersome machine be kept lumbering along to make jobs in a country where there is a severe manpower shortage.

AFTER paragraph 4 insert new paragraph:

I have dealt with Committee Chairman. What about Committee Members. Do you not all know the Committee member who remains silent in Committee Meetings, but makes a great show and hullabaloo if the public or press is present. The persons who do not listen or read their reports and agendas, and then ask questions, the answers to which have already been given. The members who for party political reasons are just opposed to an item whether or not it is in the interests of the City. The persons who don't attend Committee Meetings where matters are discussed in detail, and then at a Council Meeting want the matter held over for further investigation. The persons who waste one's time at meetings just because they like to hear their own voices, those 'holier than thou' persons who make a great song and dance about being a matter of principle. Those who claim to be making a point of order in order to make a speech. Those who reiterate points of view that have already been more ably made by someone else. Those who cannot see a situation in a larger context than that which affects their own Ward, and those whose chief concern is the state of the pavements in their Ward. And then there are those Councillors who, to my mind, take an unfair advantage of their position as Councillors in the manner in which they interrogate officials, and then there are officials who are less frank than they should be just because they feel a full disclosure would provoke too long a discussion, and what do Councillors understand about it anyway. I believe that in general meetings could be completed in half the time if members would analyse their behaviour in the light of Parkinson's observations.

PARAGRAPH 27 - first sentence should read -

Parkinson's third law is that ~~"expenditure-always~~
EXPENDITURE ALWAYS RISES TO MEET INCOME".

PARAGRAPH 29 - DELETE the words -

"and perhaps there might even have been trouble
with the acoustics requiring alterations."

NEW PARAGRAPH after 31 -

In the field of administration in which we, as administrators, are concerned, are we not in danger of scheming of ways to spend the profits made from the sale of Kaffir Beer? If the uses to which these profits could be put were extended, would we not examine more critically items of expenditure to which we now agree. The same applies to the expenditure in the native Services Levy Funds. I am hoping that the Committee examining the necessity to continue this levy will realise that there is still a need for a continued contribution from employers to the facilities being provided for their Bantu employees, and also that the use to which the funds can be put will be extended so that the best use can be made of this levy.

IN PARAGRAPH 34 - where marked - add this sentence -
Then when they want an extra member of the staff the report indicates that it can be financed out of savings - the savings being the salary saved from provisions of a non-existent member of staff.

DELETE paragraph 35 and substitute -

I think it is as well for us sometimes to sit back and take stock of ourselves. Next time you are attending a meeting of a Committee just reflect and see if it is not true that the unimportant items waste more time than the important ones. If you are the Chairman of a meeting, pause to think into what category of Chairmen you fall. If you are an official pause to think whether officials want to multiply subordinates or create rivals, and do officials make work for each other. If you are a Committee member, how do you line up with the observations in paragraph..... (this is the paragraph to be inserted after 24) Is it not time that officials were given more authority in the expenditure allocated to their departments. Do you not think that officials ~~should~~ could cut down their budgets if there was a bonus attached to the saving of expenditure.

NEW PARAGRAPH after above -

Mr. President, I wonder if, in the light of what I have said, we would really like to see ourselves as others see us. It might surprise us! Perhaps if we could just sit back and smile at our antics and idiosyncrasies it could affect a cure far less painful than if we were really able to see ourselves as seen by others.

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