

The Customs Journal

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Fortnightly

CONTENTS

	PAGE		PAGE
A Passing Chance	137	C. & E. Departmental Council	141
Current Comments	138	Choose for Yourselfes	142
The Non-Member	139	By the way	143
Civil Service Confederation	140	Sport and Social	136

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A PASSING CHANCE.

AUGUST, so greatly liked by the holiday-maker, is hardly the appropriate month wherein to dwell upon such dismal matters as sickness and disablement. But we must risk that in an attempt to remind many of our colleagues of an opportunity they may be allowing to elude their grasp, and one they will inevitably regret should advantage not be taken of it. We refer to the opportunity many have of becoming voluntary contributors to the State Health and Pensions Scheme under the Act passed last year. There are a few who have never ceased to regret their failure to avail themselves of the chance given them of becoming voluntary contributors under the 1925 Act. Procrastination was the main cause of their failure, and in the very near future there will be many others wishing they had adopted the "do it now" precept.

Unfortunately, the Act of 1929 does not enable a further chance to those who missed it previously, but it does enable many not previously eligible to become voluntary contributors to the scheme. This Act gives to every person in excepted employment (not being a married woman), who is compulsorily insured for Widows' and Orphans' Pensions, the right to become a voluntary contributor under the combined scheme of health and pensions, subject to application being made within a prescribed period of time. This right continues for a period of twenty-one months after a person has passed out of excepted employment. Many of the A.P.O. grade are therefore eligible, and it is these officers that we urge to seize the opportunity.

It is not our purpose here to dilate upon the advisability of their making this provision for themselves and their dependents. The benefits to be derived from membership of the combined schemes are apparent to everyone. Apart from

the Widows' and Ophans' Pensions, for which compulsory contributions are being paid (benefits which in the greater majority of cases will automatically lapse as promotion or incremental increases carry the contributor over the £250 per annum mark), there are the medical, sickness, disablement, maternity and old age pension benefit for contributor and wife at the age of 65 without the means qualification which ordinarily applies. In addition, the advantages of membership of an approved society will in time confer other benefits, such as additions to the State cash benefits, dental and ophthalmic treatment (including generous allowances for the purchase of dentures, ophthalmic and surgical appliances), hospital, nursing, and convalescent home benefits. There is still an erroneous impression remaining with regard to the cash benefits, and it cannot be too strongly emphasised that there is no reduction in the pay of an established Civil Servant on account of sickness benefit received by a voluntary contributor, nor is there any reduction of Civil Service pension on account of contributory old age pension. It only remains to be said that contributors in receipt of less than £250 per annum can arrange to have their contributions deducted from salary.

None of us knows when sickness or disablement is going to be our misfortune, and as a rule they entail considerable financial difficulties that few of us can overcome. We may be young to-day, but time rolls merrily on, and it was a wise man who said, "I grow no older by old age provision preventing middle-age worry." There are many at forty who commence to provide for wife and family only to wish they had thought of it at twenty-five or thirty. As we point out above, there are some who kick themselves for the lost opportunity of yesterday. Are YOU going to kick yourself to-morrow?

CURRENT COMMENTS.

THESE notes are being written on the eve of the Annual Conference. By the time the Journal appears, the Eighth Conference of the P.S.A. will be a thing of the past, and the course of the Association will have been set for another year.

The period between now and the next Conference is likely to see many changes in the Preventive Service. There is every reason to be confident regarding our chances of success at the Arbitration Court, but even without this it would seem inevitable that reorganisation of some sort will take place during the forthcoming months.

The conclusion of the Salary Claim negotiations certainly will not mean a slack time for the Association, no matter what the result of the claim may be. There will be more need than ever to maintain the high standard of P.S.A. organisation. Efforts to increase remuneration are, of course, most important, but there are many other things apart from cash which deeply affect the rank and file of the Preventive Service—things that may not be apparent to those members who do not bother to examine the work of the Association as regards general matters. There are too many members of this description. Could they but realise that despite the legitimate grievances as regards conditions of service obtaining at the moment, there are numerous benefits enjoyed, and that these have all been won by the Association, there might be more enthusiasm in connection with that side of Association that does not deal with direct claims for cash. No doubt there are some who, reading this, will wax sarcastic about the benefits, and will allow themselves to see only the grievances still to be rectified and regarding which the Association is ever active. There are some who are so short-sighted as to point accusingly at the Association and to argue that the existence of grievances indicates that the Association is not functioning usefully. They ignore the simple truth that so long as there are employers and employed there will always be differences between them, and that these cannot be settled in one great swoop, for as fast as one is got rid of another appears to

take its place. That is the natural order of things. It is because of this that Associations came into being. To say that an Association is useless because grievances exist is bad logic. The proper way to judge the usefulness of an organisation is to examine the record of its achievements, and in doing this it is necessary to avoid the temptation to undervalue an achievement because "it did not affect me personally."

How often do we hear, say, a senior officer, thoughtlessly sceptical about the worth of his Association in the ordinary way, lecturing his younger colleagues regarding the splendid conditions they enjoy as compared with his own when he was a junior? Does he imagine that these wonderful changes came about because of the benevolence of the authorities?

Also we hear the younger members complaining about the style and cut of uniform, for instance, and accusing the Association of failing to do anything in the matter. But if they could gaze upon the uniform which their elder brethren had to put up with years ago they would realise that sweeping improvements have been made—and they were not made at the instance of the powers that be.

One could quote hundreds of similar instances that would easily convince the reasonable individual. The difficulty is to make him think about them.

* * * *

Impending changes in the composition of the Headquarters Staff of the Association are likely to be the subject for lengthy discussions at the Conference. It is a most important question, and one which will require very careful consideration. There is one good thing about the present situation, the debates that must take place upon it will clear the air considerably. There are many things that should be known and fully understood in regard to the secretariat, and this will be an opportunity to remove erroneous, though popular, impressions. The net result ought to be helpful to the Headquarters Staff.

Members are asked to note that as soon as possible after the Conference the staff at Beer Lane will be making arrangements for holidays. There is normally a lull in Staff Side activity during August, and this opportunity is taken by the Association officials to escape for a short spell in the wide open spaces. It is hoped that members will be considerate as usual, and will refrain from sending along any business that is not urgent. After the first week in September the full staff will be working again, refreshed for the big fight to come.

* * * *

The decision of the Government to reduce the bonus by only five points next September is welcome, but has been received in the spirit that "half a loaf is better than no bread." It is understood that the National Staff Side is making a protest against a reduction being made at all during the time the bonus question is under consideration by the Royal Commission. The fact that it has been decided not to apply the usual conditions of bonus in this instance indicates that the Government takes the view that the basis of arriving at the cost of living is unsatisfactory. In such circumstances it would have been logical to have made no alteration in the bonus payable, but no doubt it is another case of giving us what the Treasury can afford, and not what is justly due to us. Again the Civil Service has to make sacrifices for the taxpayer. It is typical that the Press puts the boot on the other leg and broadcasts the news that the taxpayer is providing a gift to Civil Servants through the non-application of the full ten points fall in the cost-of-living figure. It is high time we got rid of the bonus system.

* * * *

Following a disagreement on the Departmental Council in January last in regard to the subsistence rates of Unattached Officers, the Customs and Excise Federation are now taking arbitration proceedings. It is understood that the "Terms of Remit" have been agreed, and that the case will come before the Court at an early date.

* * * *

In connection with information that has been given previously in the columns of the Journal with reference to the opportunity now given to many members of the A.P.O. Grade to become voluntary contributors for health and pensions under the State Insurance Scheme, those eligible are reminded that any information required can be obtained from any approved society, or from the Association Offices.

OUR BOYS.

Mr. Graham Llewellyn Hopkins, son of Mr. Richard Hopkins, P.O., Barry Dock, was awarded the Degree of Bachelor of Science at the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire.

Prior to joining the University he was educated at Barry County School.

He is a good all-round athlete and played Rugby for School and College.

We congratulate him and wish him every success.

The Non-Member

By R. B.

I've never been a bigot and I've kept an open mind
 On religion, politics, and every game,
 For I've always thought in every man some
 virtue I could find
 If to argument with open mind I came.

I can understand a suicide, a murder or divorce,
 A boosier's beer or wowsers' lemonade,
 But I cannot understand a man who takes
 without remorse
 The benefits for which he hasn't paid.

For I've seen 'em hard through piety,
 I' seen 'em kind through beer ;
 Met charity in church and street and pub,
 But the chap that gets my goat—I'd like to stir
 him to the full—
 Is the man who takes the benefits but hasn't
 paid his sub.

No, I cannot understand a man who'll simply
 stand aside
 And let the other fellow bear the load,
 Then claim his leave and overtime, it's like his
 measly hide,
 He's not a man—he's just a loathsome toad.

—"New Dawn."

Civil Service Confederation.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING.

A meeting of the Executive Committee of the Civil Service Confederation was held on Monday, 21st July, 1930, at Livingstone Hall, Broadway, Westminster, when Mr. Ross Wyld presided over an attendance of twenty-eight.

It was reported that the claim for improved increments for Warehousemen in the Stores Branch of the Customs and Excise Department was heard at the Industrial Court on the 1st July. The award of the Court had not yet been received.

With reference to the question of Sick Pay for Unestablished Classes, a reply had been received from the Financial Secretary to the Treasury refusing to receive a deputation, and the position would be reviewed by the Sick Pay Committee at an early date.

The Finance and Organisation Committee Report, including the Statement of Accounts for the quarter ended 30th June, 1930, was adopted. The Report included the recommendation that the consideration of the question of providing superannuation benefits for the staff should be temporarily deferred.

With reference to the subject of Association salary claims, which had been met with refusal of consideration by the Treasury or Department on the ground that the Royal Commission on the Civil Service is considering questions of a similar character to those desired to be made the subject of discussion, it was reported that no further cases had been notified as a result of the additional questionnaire issued on the instructions of the Executive Committee.

The Honorary General Secretary made a report on National Whitley matters, including the following items:—Establishment of Certain Unestablished Grades; Vacancies to be filled by transfer, per-

manently or on loan; Injuries on Duty; Deductions from Pay on Establishment; Basement Accommodation; Unestablished Sick Leave; Suggestions and Awards; Machine Operators; and Subsistence—Day Rates and Per Noctem Rates.

In connection with "Deductions from Pay on Establishment," it was reported that the Official Side had agreed that in future the practice of making a ten per cent. reduction of salary on appointment of an Unestablished Civil Servant to an Established post should entirely cease to operate. An effort was to be made to obtain retrospective effect to the arrangement in regard to certain grades which on establishment had been subject to deduction of salary throughout the scale.

A lengthy discussion took place on the decision of the Government in regard to the Cost-of-Living Bonus for the six months commencing 1st September, 1930. It was ultimately agreed that the National Staff Side should be informed that, in the opinion of Confederation, action should be taken by the National Staff Side to obtain the opinion of the Civil Service on the failure of the Government to maintain payment of bonus on the existing figure of 50, with a view to a protest being made in Parliament against this failure at the beginning of the next Parliamentary session.

In connection with the evidence of the National Staff Side to the Royal Commission, it was reported that certain preliminary steps were being taken by a Sub-Committee of the National Staff Side in connection with the preparation of evidence on (1) the institution of a Contributory Civil Service Pension Scheme, and (2) a Widows' and Orphans' Pension Scheme. It was agreed that both matters should be left in the hands of Confederation representatives on the National Staff Side, to which body the draft evidence is to be submitted on the 30th July, 1930.

Customs and Excise Departmental Council.

The 119th meeting of the Council was held in the Custom House, London, on 23rd July, 1930, the Chair being taken by Sir F. L. C. Floud, K.C.B., Chairman of the Board of Customs and Excise.

ACTING PAY.

The Council ratified a Committee agreement to extend to the Customs and Excise Departmental Clerical Class the Industrial Court Awards Nos. 1418 and 1456, granting extra pay to Clerical Officers undertaking duties of officers of a higher grade, or of the same grade but in receipt of an allowance, during the latter's absence.

A disagreement on the operative date of this extension was also discussed, and the matter was adjourned for reconsideration.

PROVINCIAL DIFFERENTIATION (Departmental Clerical Class).

The Committee to which this subject had been referred having disagreed on the question of its discussion while the Royal Commission was sitting, it was urged by the Staff Side of the Council that a Departmental case existed for a discussion on merits, irrespectively of consideration of the general principle elsewhere. It was decided to adjourn the subject until the next meeting.

LEAVE IN HALF-DAYS.

Following previous discussions, it was now agreed that in Headquarters Offices, private leave might be taken in half-days (excluding Saturdays), up to a maximum of six half-days per year by Higher Clerical Officers, Clerical Officers, "P" Class Clerks, Typists and Writing Assistants.

OFFICE ACCOMMODATION.

The Staff Side expressed dissatisfaction with the slow progress made by the Special Committee on Office Accommodation since its appointment in December last. Although the subject presented many difficulties, they felt that proceedings were unduly protracted.

The Official Side stated that having regard to the wide field to be covered, they considered that the Committee's progress was satisfactory. They fully sympathised with the Staff Side's aspirations in regard to such questions as heating, lighting, etc., but felt that it might prove impracticable in many respects to lay down rigid standards.

RESPONSIBILITY for PERSONAL PROPERTY.

The Staff Side drew attention to the risk of loss on official premises, and sought a statement on the question of Departmental responsibility in this connection.

Prior to adjournment, the Official Side stated generally that the Department endeavoured to make the position as secure as possible, and they relied on the staff to co-operate by making full use of the lockers and other facilities provided. The Crown could not accept a general responsibility, though in exceptional circumstances where the officer was in no way to blame the question of an *ex gratia* grant might be considered.

COLLECTORS' OFFICE SCHEMES.

The Staff Side represented that difficulties had been experienced in determining the appropriate Whitley body in which the allocation of duties to the various posts and seats in the Collectors' Offices might be discussed.

It was mutually recognised that any such discussion must be related to the circumstances of the particular office involved, and, after further consideration, it was decided that any detailed arrangements necessary to rectify the position should be settled informally.

OTHER MATTERS.

Committee disagreements on the starting pay of seven Departmental Clerical Officers were the subject of detailed statements by the Staff-Side, and the Official Side undertook to give further consideration to these on adjournment.

The Council resolved to express its congratulations to the Customs and Excise Sports Club on its recent achievements, notably in cricket and athletics.

The local decisions confirmed included agreements on the staffing of the Collectors' Offices at Birmingham, Grimsby and Sunderland. A number of other decisions advised by Sectional, Local and Office Committees, were considered by the Council with results that have been communicated to the Committees concerned.

The next meeting of the Council will be held on 24th September, 1930.

Choose for Yourselves

ABOUT two years ago Teddy Lane of our section had marrow with his Sunday dinner. This week, as a direct result of that marrow eating, he has received promotion to the Executive Class, passing over 93 of his colleagues. It sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? The facts, however, are indisputable.

After the Lane family had finished dinner, the remains of that wretched marrow were thrown on to a rubbish heap in the garden. In that heap there must have been something that marrows like—nitrates or phosphates or lime—for in due course one of the seeds germinated, and up grew a marrow plant. It grew and grew, and eventually produced a fine marrow. That in its turn grew and grew. One of Teddy's neighbours said, partly in fun, "Why not put it in for the vegetable show? It's a beauty."

Well, Teddy did enter it, and it won first prize. (This is a true story and not a fairy tale. I've seen the butter dish they presented to him. At least, I think that it is a butter dish—or possibly it is for jam, or fruit, or pickles.)

This success went to Teddy's head. He bought gardening books and decided to become a grower of vegetables and fruit and flowers. Living as he did, however, in a Council house down Tooting way, he felt the handicap of insufficient land; but he infected his family with the gardening fever, and eventually the Lane family shook the Tooting dust from their feet, and moved down to a country village close to Sevenoaks. The new garden was nearly an acre in extent—but the scene now changes to a Government office not a hundred miles from St. Martin's-le-Grand.

Teddy's garden may have satisfied all his desires for vegetable growing, but the train service to Town was so inadequate that the one and only morning train landed him at the office just an hour and a half before any other member of the staff arrived. At first Teddy filled in the time of waiting by strolling round the long, empty corridors; but after a collision with the office sweep, and thrice falling over cleaners' pails, he gave that up. Then he decided that he could stay a few minutes extra in bed, and also occupy some of that waiting period at the office, if he brought up a set of brushes and cleaned his boots in his room. This he did, spending a whole hour putting the most marvellous of polishes on his shoes. Soon after this he transferred more of his toilet articles from home to the office, and spent his ninety minutes polishing, shaving, shampooing, manicuring, and brushing. It certainly made an impressive alteration in his appearance, for previously he had not been over-particular in these respects. When we others arrived on duty mud-spattered and crumpled from our strap-hanging on tubes and walks through filthy streets, there was Teddy Lane sitting at his desk the very picture of neatness and spruceness.

The chiefs began to take notice of Teddy's smart appearance. And when that vacancy occurred last week, no one was really very surprised when the announcement was made that Teddy was the lucky man.

And the moral apparently is—well, help yourselves. Perhaps it is to eat more marrows, or catch earlier trains and shave at the office, or move to villages near Sevenoaks, or—oh, choose one for yourselves!

By the way

"CUSTOM HOUSE TO GO."

So reads a headline in a recent newspaper over a reference to the building in Lower Thames Street. There have been a good number of rumours of this sort during the last few years, and I suppose the old building will have to go some day. Possibly it has become too small for the amount of work that has to be performed within its walls, or it may be that the ground upon which it stands is required for expansion of business premises. Whatever happens, the removal of the London Custom House will necessitate the erection of a new building to take its place, and the new building must be in use before the commencement of the old building's demolition.

* * * *

I cannot conceive of a Custom House being erected outside the bounds of the City of London. A department having such intimate connections with the business world as has the Customs and Excise, could not have its headquarters placed at such a distance, for instance, as Whitehall. Imagine the flocks of merchants and their clerks making pilgrimages from the City to Charing Cross or Westminster several times a day! It does not bear thinking of. No, if we are to have a new Custom House, there is little doubt but that it will be somewhere in the City. The present site is an ancient one and has been occupied by a Custom House for many hundreds of years.

* * * *

There are many who think that if all import duties were to be repealed there would be no more need of the Customs Service. The work of the Department is not confined to the collection of revenue. One very important function is the assembling of all statistics regarding the state of foreign and colonial trade. Through the Customs and Excise Department the Government is able to put its finger on the pulse of trade, and successive governments are enabled to shape their policies in this direction by a study of the figures,

Which, of course, brings us back to tariffs and Custom Houses and things.

* * * *

The scene at Anderton's on Tuesday night and Wednesday morning was much the same as in previous years when the Council of the Association gathered for this year's conference. There were old, well-known faces intermingling with those who were attending their first Conference. Welcomes to comparative strangers and the hearty greetings of old friends. There is a very particular charm about these meetings, and I can well imagine members who have ceased to become Councillors taking a stroll up to Anderton's just to mix with those with whom they have deliberated in past times.

* * * *

A visitor is generally struck by the representative nature of the Conference. It is seldom that the four corners of the British Isles is not represented, and it would usually be quite possible to open the proceedings by the singing of the English, Irish, Scotch and Welsh national airs by a scion of each country.

* * * *

By far the most important item to be discussed at this year's Conference will be the Salary Claim. I have no doubt but that the Council will unanimously endorse the opinion that has been expressed by many local meetings all round the coast. The membership is fully conscious of the justice of its claim, and has no fear of the result when it is discussed by an unbiased tribunal.

* * * *

The time has come when the Waterguard is tully alive to its responsibilities and to its position in the scheme of things.

