

COLONIAL SECRETARY'S DEPARTMENT.

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W. T. SOUTHORN,
Colonial Secretary.

18th March, 1932.

HONG KONG.

No. 45.

DOWNING STREET,
11th February, 1932.

Sir,

I have the honour to inform you that, after very careful consideration, I have decided to assimilate the system of recruitment for the Cadet Services of Malaya and Hong Kong to that in force for the Colonial Service generally. An announcement to this effect, of which I enclose a copy,* appeared in the press on January 26th.

2. As a consequence of this decision, which was taken after consultation with the Civil Service Commission and the Colonial Service Appointments Board, and with the concurrence of both bodies, candidates for the Cadet Services in the above mentioned Colonies will in future be selected on the recommendation of the Colonial Service Appointments Board, instead of, as hitherto, according to the results of the competitive examination held by the Civil Service Commission for the Home and Indian Civil Services. The position of Ceylon is special and will be separately considered in consultation with the Governor. In the meantime the postponement of a decision in regard to that Island will have no immediate practical effect since the recruitment of Europeans for the Civil Service is at present suspended.

3. I realise that there may be some who will regret this decision as marking a break with a long and honourable tradition. I sympathise with that regret, and I would hasten to assure you that my decision was not based on any failure to appreciate the valuable services which have been rendered in the past, and are being rendered today, by men who have entered the Cadet Services through the competitive examination. Many of them, I am aware, have achieved distinction not only in the Eastern Colonies but in other parts of the Colonial Empire, to whose general development members of the Cadet Services have materially contributed.

4. At the same time it is essential to take account of the great changes which are so rapidly taking place in the Colonial Empire as a whole. It is necessary also to remember that the whole problem of recruitment at home has of recent years been considerably modified, on the one hand by economic forces arising out of the war, and on the other by the development of fresh alternative careers now open to the class of man which the Colonial Service desires to attract. In deciding to discontinue the competitive examination, I have been looking not at the past but to the future.

5. At a time when the Colonial Empire consisted of scattered units, separated from each other and from this country by distances which the modern methods of communication had not yet bridged, and when the administration of many of these units was still in the pioneering stage, it was not unnatural that recruitment for the older Administrations of

Governor

SIR WILLIAM PEEL, K.C.M.G., K.B.E.,

etc., *etc.*, *etc.*,

* Not printed.

Ceylon, Malaya and Hong Kong should be linked to that of the Home and, especially, the Indian Civil Services with which they had most in common. As a natural corollary to the rapid development of the Colonial Empire as a whole in recent years, corresponding changes and developments have taken place in the importance, character, and requirements of the general Colonial Service. In consequence the Services of the Eastern Colonies have now to be considered in relation to that general Service, and their affinity with it, rather than with the Indian and Home Services, is daily becoming closer.

6. Whatever may have been the case in the past, the qualifications demanded in candidates for administrative posts in the Colonial Service do not now differ in any essential feature in whatever part of the Colonial Empire they may be required to serve. In recruiting men of the same type for the same kind of work and in the same market, it is clear that the best interests of all the Administrations concerned lie in presenting a single united appeal to the type of candidates they wish to attract. The prestige of a Colonial Service, entered by one uniform channel and presenting opportunities world wide in their scope, must eventually be far greater than that of a number of relatively small Services with no co-ordinated method of recruitment; and the Colonial Empire as a whole has become of such importance, that no step which will enhance the prestige and efficiency of the Service which administers it can safely be neglected.

7. There were therefore the strongest grounds for adopting a single channel of appointment to posts of the same type in the Colonial Empire. It remained to consider what this channel should be, and at what stage the change should be introduced. I found that the overwhelming weight of experience and argument was in favour of the selection system. For various reasons, which I need not elaborate here, the adoption of the examination system would have been impracticable for the Colonial Service as a whole, however satisfactory it may have been in meeting the relatively small requirements of the Cadet Services. Moreover, the Committee of the Colonial Office Conference of 1930, which examined the question of the unification of the Colonial Service, explicitly deprecated the extension of the examination system beyond the areas in which it was then in force. On the other hand, the testimony of the Warren Fisher Committee to the success of the selection system and the fact that, as a result of that Committee's report, the selection system has been placed on a settled and permanent basis—and has been protected against suspicion on the score of partiality or unfairness, if any such suspicion there were, by the institution of the Colonial Service Appointments Board—led almost inevitably to the conclusion that, if a single method of entry were adopted, that method should be the selection system.

8. While the obvious advantage of this system lies in its peculiar adaptability for securing men endowed with those necessary qualities of character and temperament which are not readily amenable to the test of a written examination, it should not be supposed that the introduction of the system need involve any departure from the high standards of intellectual ability and academic distinction which are admittedly characteristic of the services recruited in past years by the competitive examination. Under the selection system a judicious scrutiny of the academic records and attainments of the candidate enables a close assessment to be made of his intellectual qualifications; and the educational records of recent applicants show that the Services already recruited by the selection system are now attracting young men of real ability who, from this point of view apart from any other, are fully able to stand comparison with those obtainable through the examination. With the added prestige which the Colonial Service will gain from presenting a single appeal to candidates, I am confident that there is every expectation that the standard already reached will be maintained and even raised.

9. On the other hand, the pressure of financial considerations tends nowadays greatly to enhance the attractiveness of any profession or service which offers a career as soon as possible after the conclusion of a University course and which does not impose any additional hazard such as a severe ad hoc examination, involving delay and, in some cases, additional expense. In this respect there is a marked difference between post-war and pre-war conditions. In view of this and of the remarkable increase in the prestige and popularity of the main Colonial Service, which does not impose any academic test apart from those provided by the ordinary University curriculum, there are strong grounds for supposing that, were the Eastern Colonies to retain the examination, they would, as time went on, find their field of choice seriously restricted as compared with that at the disposal of the rest of the Service.

10. It will be seen therefore that under the conditions of today, the adoption of a common method of entry for the whole Service is likely to prove generally advantageous, not only to the Colonial Service as a whole, but to each of its component elements. It is further clear that the two main arguments used in the past for the retention of the competitive examination, *i.e.* (1) that the selection system was difficult to defend against charges of partiality and (2) that it did not produce a sufficiently high standard of intellectual ability, can no longer be substantiated. On the other hand the selection system has been proved to possess distinct advantages both in widening the field of choice and in enabling weight to be given more easily to qualifications which are of great importance in the candidates to be selected. The results of the change can, of course, only be judged from experience, but I feel that there is every reason to look upon the future with confidence.

11. Assuming then that the change was to be made, there were convincing arguments for making it immediately. In the ordinary way I should have wished to give as long notice as possible of such a decision but it was brought to my notice that the temporary reduction of other openings for young men, owing to the existing financial depression, would enable the selection of candidates for the Colonial Service in 1932 to be carried out under peculiarly favourable conditions, and that the initial difficulties which must inevitably attend any radical change of system would thus be reduced to a minimum. On the other hand, should the change be postponed, it was quite possible that an exceptionally favourable opportunity for establishing the position of the Colonial Service as a first class career might have been missed. I did not feel justified in taking so serious a risk and accordingly felt it necessary to treat the matter as one of urgency and to announce the change in time for it to be introduced in connection with the selection of candidates in 1932.

12. As this despatch will, no doubt, be of interest to officials and to members of the public in the territories immediately affected by the decision, I have to request that it may be published locally in such a manner as may commend itself to you.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient,

humble servant,

(Sgd.) P. CUNLIFFE-LISTER.