11 General Developments after 1945

THE B.PHIL./M.PHIL.

At their meeting in February 1945 the Social Studies Board appointed a Committee to discuss every aspect of PPE and to report what alternative possibilities there were for the future. The members were Professor H. J. Paton, Chairman of the Board, Professor H. H. Price, and D. M. MacKinnon (philosophy); Professor Cole and R. B. McCallum (politics) and H. D. Henderson and R. L. Hall (economics). They made three main recommendations:

(i) The institution of a postgraduate course for each of the three subjects of the School leading possibly to a Bachelor of Philosophy (B.Phil.).

(ii) Changes in the entrance requirements involving a Preliminary Examination with papers closely related to the scope of the Final Honours School.

(iii) The possible introduction of an Honour Moderations for Social Studies of six papers, two from each side of the School. This would be taken after five Terms and would in effect turn PPE into a four-year School, comparable with Lit. Hum. It might be possible, however, to allow candidates who had taken the new Honour Moderations to take the Final School in four Terms, i.e. 9 Terms in all. Candidates who entered the Final Honour School after taking Honour Moderations might well be allowed to drop one subject. In the Committee’s mind this development was linked with the possibility of reducing the scope of the School.

The ideas were discussed by the three Sub-Faculties in October-
November 1945. All were in favour of the new postgraduate Degree. The Philosophy Sub-Faculty unanimously agreed that the existing arrangements for the B. Litt. were unsatisfactory and that a new postgraduate School in Philosophy should be created, analogous in some respects to the BCL. The Economics Sub-Faculty were also strongly in favour and the Politics Sub-Faculty agreed in general principle.

The proposal for a Preliminary Examination related to the subjects of PPE also got general support. There was, however, little or no support for the introduction of an Honour Moderations leading to PPE. The Philosophers thought three years was sufficient time. The Economists were not prepared to accept any reduction in the present scope of the Final Honours School which would turn it into a two-subject School. They thought, however, that advantage should be taken of the introduction of a B.Phil. to simplify the character of PPE by removing the specialist tendencies which were more appropriate in a postgraduate course.

Thus it was generally agreed in the Faculty to go ahead with the introduction of a new postgraduate Degree and a new First Public Examination. As regards the B.Phil. there were points of difference between the Sub-Faculties particularly as to whether provision should be made for an optional or a compulsory short thesis. On one matter the Philosophers got their way – the other two Sub-Faculties accepted their strongly held views that there should be neither Classes nor Distinctions in the B.Phil., but reserved the right to re-open the question at some date after the Degree had been established.

In presenting their case to the General Board in January 1946 the Lit. Hum. Board argued that the B.Litt. system required candidates to be supervised and examined *ad hominem*, hence there was no concerted instruction for them in philosophy. Theses were on disparate and often excessively peripheral subjects which did not bring them in touch with each other nor create a demand for co-ordinated instruction in subjects other than those already covered by the Final Honours School. Consequently there was little utilisation of the expertise of the Oxford philosophy teachers. This was producing a tendency to multiply the alternative special subjects in Lit. Hum. and PPE.

The Philosophy Sub-Faculty proposed the introduction of a new degree comprised of a small thesis (say 80 pages); a paper on a Chosen Authority, e.g. the cardinal doctrines of some major