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EDITORIAL

As the battle over cuts in public expenditure rages on, it is plain that the economies mean many different things to different people—including, no doubt, to some taxpayers and ratepayers a salutary brake on that over-maned Civil Service and those extravagant town halls.

One of the less publicised casualties in this painful situation is the morale of the professional—amongst whom we include the army of trained men and women who are not members of the “ancient and noble” callings but who still minister to people in ways which have become indispensable to modern society. Members of the Prison Service are included in this category.

Morale depends on many things—good leadership, satisfaction in work, adequate rewards, recognition—but mainly on the knowledge that one has been true to the personal standards which are accepted in choosing to become professional. These are moral standards, and that is what professionalism means. Morale is also, for the individual, influenced by the life-span of a career, and a young man's optimism may be of a different order from that of his seniors. Certainly for most of the middle managers and senior practitioners in any service, on whom the system so greatly depends, events which threaten the quality of work, increase the difficulties and frustrations, veto new ideas and developments, perhaps for a period of years, can be a crushing blow. The resilience to adapt, the stoicism to accept that there may be no “arriving” now, nor even much hope in travelling, do not come easily.

Many members of the Prison Service—officers, governors, and specialists too—have lived in hope for years of seeing, not merely adequate resources to end the sheer physical chaos of overcrowding, but recognition of and encouragement for the positive and imaginative part of their work with difficult and damaged human beings. Many of them are now coping, in various ways, with the realisation that once again things must get worse before they can get better, and that their personal chances of being there for the upturn are sadly reduced.

In this situation leadership at all levels of management is absolutely vital. It is insidiously easy in critical times for expediency to be promoted to an aim in itself, and to find virtue by default in a lowering of professional standards, and there are always some few who confuse humanitarianism with privileges, and whose rigid views need no reinforcement. In defining “essential tasks” it is often easier to eliminate worthwhile activities not vital to base needs rather than to spread sacrifice so as to maintain a balanced standard of life.

In these times it cannot be emphasised too often, from the top and at all levels of authority, that we have not lost sight of ideals, and that good housekeeping need not be a blunt instrument.