

CHAPTER THREE

PARLIAMENT MEN AT WORK

"When you have convinced thinking men that it is right, and humane men that it is just, you will gain your cause. Men lose half of what is gained by violence. What is gained by argument is gained forever."

WENDELL PHILLIPS.

STILL today the highest ambition of Englishmen is a seat in the House of Commons. Consequently this produces competition among the best men, and women, for seats. The predominant sense of duty in the House, standards, traditions and conscience—provides a corporate body of rulers with virtues which often drive out individual vices such as covetousness, cowardice, and laziness; so that they shine by comparison with similar bodies elsewhere. Above all, they develop and spread throughout the nation a sense of responsibility for the welfare of the world, and even some knowledge of political economy.

That has been described in the previous chapters. Let me now describe the Member of Parliament's career from start to finish, and so show both the critic-ruler and the education he receives and gives, under British conditions.

THE BOY

The average English boy begins to read the newspapers at the age of 14, probably to see the cricket scores or football news, and drifts thence into the Foreign Intelligence and parliamentary reports. He generally inherits his political inclinations from his father, and his teachers avoid influ-

encing his opinions by conveniently halting English history at a date before he was born. What modern politics and history he knows comes from back numbers of *Punch*. At college or in the workshops, from 19 onwards, friends may drag him either into sport or into politics. Politics are generally of the Left, for youth likes to shock his elders and feel up to date—wise amid a sea of ignorance. Among the working class, the chapel society fills the place of college for the more fortunately situated. Wide sympathies come naturally to youth, and droop after marriage. At least the youth has time to acquire a hero, take part in a debate, and assist at an election contest.

THE CANDIDATE

I was asked to stand as socialist candidate for Jarrow-on-Tyne before my 21st birthday, and for the Newcastle-on-Tyne City Council shortly after. Then marriage and the cares of this world dissipated politics, and damped down my urgent desire to educate and direct mankind. Some, coming from the ruling families, are more lucky and fight seats and even get elected before they are 30; others, with less money or opportunity, revisit at election times the dreams of aspiring youth. All remember every General Election, when they cheered or groaned as the Party gains or losses were recorded at midnight, under the naphtha flares in the market square.

However, we will suppose that there is a vacancy for a candidate for the Borough of X. (It is perhaps more distinguished to sit for a County division as 'knight of the shire', but such seats cost more to fight, so—Borough or County, it is no matter!) The local Party leaders, weighing wealth against ability, approach the aspirant rather in the manner of backers approaching a prize-fighter. He addresses the Party Five Hundred in a carefully-conned speech which, if

wise, he will confine to the merits of the Party and the virtues of the statesmen who lead it. With crusading zeal, I ventured on disputed questions and nearly got 'ploughed' on Home Rule for Ireland. Whereafter the local press took me to their hearts and attended all my meetings in the not unjustified hope of a 'story'.

THE CANDIDATE AS FIGUREHEAD

The candidate becomes immediately the sole figurehead. He does not, as in America, share the fight with judges, governors, mayors, councillors and executive officers. The limelight focuses on him alone, and on him alone falls the work. He imports political stars to draw the curious to his meetings—at which he arrives late, followed by a bunch of cheer-leaders. Some candidates scarify their opponent, and his arguments, and especially anything he has put in print. I have found this unwise, since it provides said opponent with something to talk about, and it may lead to a libel action. Others never mention the fellow's name, as though people could hardly know of his insignificant existence.

After your speech comes the 'heckling'. Questions, verbal and in writing, are showered upon you. You tire hecklers out by answering at considerable length, until the chairman says that you must rush off to another meeting. It is a mistake to 'score off' hecklers and raise a laugh on them; you can, in that way, considerably annoy an honest but unintelligible supporter. But with a drunken opponent you may effectively beg him to repeat his question again and again, if possible inducing him to stand on a chair to be the better heard (and seen). Never forget that you are providing a music-hall show as well as moral elevation. This sort of thing cost me £400 a year.

As the polling day approaches, the *tempo* rises, till every elector has been canvassed by both sides, till every window bears your portrait or his, till all the children wear his colours or yours and sing the right, or wrong, election song.

THE ELECTION

On the day itself, all schools close and become polling stations, the children march, dressed in either blue or red, singing as a perpetual refrain, "Vote, Vote, Vote for Mr. Jackson", or as the case may be, while in twenty-four committee-rooms volunteers strike off your men's names as they record their votes, and dash out to drag from their homes those 'promises' who have not yet voted.

In those days we polled over 90 per cent of the electorate: the sick were carried from their beds; cars travelled 100 miles to fetch an absent voter; you knew and watched for every dead opponent.

The ballot boxes were collected by cars, and at 9 p.m. the counting started in the Town Hall. Here, backed by twenty flushed supporters, you met, probably for the first time, your opponent, similarly backed. If the candidates do not shake hands there is a story for the Press. You look over the shoulders of the official counters, inevitably watching a box in which your opponent seems to beat you by two to one. Move on; they are not all as bad as that. Gradually a smile of satisfaction steals over your face as one by one your supporters, also looking on, walk past you, furtively grasp your hand and whisper, "Audley's 10 to 1; solid!" The tabulated results from more and more boxes are taken up to the dais to the recording Town Clerk; bad voting papers are scrutinized. Now the last slip of paper is passed up, and all the room turns towards him as he checks and adds up the figures and hands a paper to the Mayor.

"In, by 2207"; word flies round the room and round the town before ever the Mayor can read out the figures. Straightway pandemonium breaks loose.

On the balcony, overlooking a sea of upcast faces, the Mayor tries vainly to be heard as he declares the latest of a 600-year-long line, to be "duly elected and returned Member of Parliament for the Borough of X". The victor moves, and the defeated candidate seconds (somewhat sourly) a vote of thanks to Mr. Mayor, the returning officer; but nothing is heard for the roar outside where four thousand frenzied men and women wait to seize their hero and carry him toward his ruined car. It is the culmination of years of hard work, the proudest moment of his life—and possibly the last happy moment for some time; such is the difficulty of remaining a hero.

Success in sport is nothing to success in politics. Of course, in spite of the odds hardening as the day approaches, many have made money. But among that waving crowd of caps and hats are many chapel elders, tight-lipped, feeling as though Marston Moor had been won again for the saints. There too are the rebels with tears in their eyes, almost believing that what he has said will come true in their time.

THE OLD MACHINE

It is from this atmosphere, almost of dedication, that the man goes up to Westminster. There he finds 614 others, fresh from promises, devotion and victory. The old machine has seen that crowd a hundred times—a thousand times—before, and moves so slowly in the cold, old hands of the great, experienced, tactful bureaucracy. There is much to be said for, as well as against, the American 'spoils' system. In America, executive and bureaucracy change with a change of President, 'the spoils to the victors'. When this extends

to postmasters, the 'spoils system' certainly goes too far; but I think the heads of the Civil Service should be inclined by affection to facilitate a new administration.

I became, at once, parliamentary private secretary (unpaid) to my friend Walter Runciman, M.P., who was Under-Secretary to the Right Hon. John Burns, at what is now the Ministry of Health. John Burns had been a socialist agitator, the terror of respectable London. His permanent officials said of him: "When first John came in, with his bowler hat and reefer jacket, we were a bit nervous. But now, bless you, he feeds out of our hands." This is too generally the case with Labour Ministers, even when drawn from the 'Master-Class'.

THE PRIVATE MEMBER

The enthusiasts arrive, bursting with energy, and the cold tap of reality chills their heart. "What can we do if we have no chance to bring in Bills or move resolutions?" I once said in despair to John Morley. "The function of the private Member," coldly replied the sage, "is to popularize in the country the policy of his Party." So I spent *my* time asking John Morley, then Secretary of State for India, inconvenient questions about the government of that country; while he put through those Morley-Minto reforms which permanently divided Indians into two distinct electing-pens, labelled 'Mahommedan' and 'Hindoo'. We have never been able to get rid of this and it is still the supreme bar to democracy in India.

STONE-WALLING BY THE DEPARTMENTS

Our youthful enthusiast for the regeneration of mankind gradually finds himself up against two mighty stone walls,

two inert organizations trained and equipped to resist just such as himself. He has arrived among the rulers, but by no means as a dictator. His bowling is stone-walled by the Party machine and by the bureaucracy—known collectively and colloquially as ‘the Departments’.

The Departments stone-wall even their Secretaries of State, their under-secretaries, and the parliamentary private secretaries, unpaid (hereafter known as the P.P.S.s). It is their business to show that ‘it can’t be done’. They perform the really useful function of *advocatus diaboli*; and their criticism, based on years of experience, and special knowledge, fortified by the practice and traditions of the office, make them well-nigh irresistible. Their first weapon, used to break in the new Ministers, is tact. They convey to each new Minister their conviction that he is the best and most intelligent master they have ever had. They ever regret (in words) the obstinacy of the Treasury, and fall back whenever pressed upon this invaluable partner in resistance. The Minister will, however, confer a lasting benefit on the State if he can persuade the Cabinet to give time for the passage into law of a most important measure which, alas, his predecessor was unable to put through. And they produce from their pigeon-holes some one of those ‘innocuous’ measures they keep permanently in cold storage, the measure they think would best suit the Minister’s tastes. So he is kept occupied and pacified, and in due course a new Housing or Small Holdings Act appears upon the Statute Book; while the Rating of Land Values, and suchlike revolutionary matter, can be postponed for further enquiry as hardly likely at present to enhance the Minister’s credit for practical efficiency.

The only way to defeat such stone-walling is to get the head of the particular Department, or better still his pro-

spective successor, on your side by personal and social contact. Do not pester him, but when found behind the Speaker's Chair in the House of Commons, sweep him off to the bar for a quick one with the boys. Visit him in his office for a gossip. No attention paid to the Civil Servant is ever wasted. He is really human at bottom, and in due course will actually suggest to you the questions he wishes to have asked of 'his minister' in the House. Under the surface he may develop a new enthusiasm for his job, and lose that scared defensive look with which he normally greets the Member of Parliament gad-fly.

THE HOME OFFICE

Each Department has of course its own technique and character. Naturally, I always found the Home Office most 'allergic'. They deal with that less pleasing side of socialism involving constant coercion of the individual for what they believe to be the good of the State. They manufacture crime in the interests of virtue. They modify the justice of the Law Courts with the expediency of the administrator. They share with the Gestapo a liking for an indeterminate sentence 'during pleasure', of course in hope of 'reform'.

But they always have Bills on hand—to prevent prostitution, or money-lending, or share-pushing, or buying at auctions, or going on strike, or putting brass plates on a professional door, or being a nurse, or an architect, or an undertaker, or a dentist, unless you have been accepted by the favoured organization and do not overcrowd the profession. They provide more and more work for 'their' Police, looking after 'their' public. In short, they hope to coerce us into being good some time; but cannot believe that they themselves ever could, or should ever, be dispensed with. Emphatically they disbelieve in the perfectibility of human

nature, or the supremacy of conscience over law. In common with 'Military Intelligence' they suspect all men, and would like to license and inspect all our goings-on and our lyings-down.

Their appetite has grown immensely in the last 40 years. I foresee a time when every trade will be constricted and canalized, in like manner to the professions. Sometimes outsiders call it Guild Socialism, sometimes syndicalism, sometimes Political and Economic Planning, sometimes fascism; but they themselves call it regulation and planning. Mussolini made the trains run to time. Could there be a higher goal—for the British Home Office?

THE PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS

The Home Office is of peculiar and great interest to the private Member—evidently to me also from another angle. Normally 10½ hours a week of parliamentary time is allotted to private Members to introduce Resolutions of the House or Bills to be debated and, if the Speaker thinks fit, to be voted on. Exigencies of the public service generally cut down the time by half, but normally some twenty private Members have a chance to get their Bill through its Second Reading in the House, whence it goes to Standing Committee upstairs to be put into shape with the help of the Government. The first few to get through Committee have then a chance to get their Bill through Report stage and Third Reading, whereafter, if there is time, the Lords will deal with it.

The Resolutions serve the useful purpose of securing a debate on any question of the moment. But naturally no Government wants to have inconvenient Resolutions or Bills. Therefore all of the 550 non-ministerial Members of Parliament are encouraged to ballot for the chances of 'get-

ting time', so that those members who are likely to be annoying may not have it all their own way. The Whips supply the lists of subjects or Bills of which they approve, and it is not often that Resolutions inconvenient to both Parties get beyond appearing on the Paper. With Bills it is otherwise. Labour Members of Parliament are supposed to select from the list of Party Bills; but National Members of Parliament have latitude. The lucky man is at once besieged by all the Societies for Propaganda, from Anti-Vivisection to the Auctioneers Association. There must be fifty societies of this sort who have a Bill ready, to improve the world and assist their members. All are well-intentioned; but I regret to say that most of their Bills involve putting into prison some innocent person—innocent, that is, until the Bill becomes an Act of Parliament.

Few notice this penal clause, so intent are they on 'doing good'. I always attend with pleasure on those Friday afternoons, when both sides chorus approval of some impertinent Bill, in order maliciously to prick the bubble of benevolence. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is one which all should support. They have a Bill for the licensing and inspecting of livery stables to prevent 'crocks' being hired out for butchers to ride. Ninety-nine out of a hundred would vote for it blindfold. Why not?

Or the Bill is to raise the age of consent. Why not?

Or to license dentists, or nurses, or architects, or shoeblacks when there were any. Why not?

Or the Bill is to limit interest demanded by moneylenders; or to prevent 'knock-out' sales; or to disinfect prostitutes; or to compel canal bargees to send their children to school; or to close shops on Sunday; or to stop fools from being fleeced.

I would undertake to make out a case for each and all of these Bills which should move the House. Only—are you justified in sending an unlicensed man, or boy, or girl, to gaol in the sacred ‘interests of society’? Are you justified in closing professions to the poor, in the interests of those already in the profession? Are you justified in raising the cost to the consumer? Are you justified in smashing a man whose business was legal, even useful, possibly honourable? I do not know; maybe you are. But before an amiable majority, on a Friday afternoon (or any majority at any time), decides that you should do so, let them be asked to reflect that expediency and emotion are poor guides, that the individual ‘has certain inalienable rights’, and that every political crime, including the crucifixion, has been in accord with the will of a majority.

A PARABLE

Xenophon tells this story of the education of the younger Cyrus: That he might learn how to rule, his father appointed the boy judge of a children’s court. There were brought before him a big boy and a little boy, and the little boy was crying bitterly. “He has taken my coat,” he said. Cyrus turned to the big boy: “Have you taken his coat?” “Yes, I have, but please, sir, I gave him my own in exchange, because his is too big for him and mine was too small for me.” “Oh!” said Cyrus. “Let us see.” Behold, the little boy’s coat did fit the big boy, and the big boy’s coat fitted the little boy. When Cyrus saw this he was well pleased. “So it shall be,” he said: but the little boy went away, still crying bitterly. The courtiers marvelled at such wisdom, and Cyrus ran to his father to tell him how clever he had been. Darius, however, ordered him to be whipped, saying, “I sent you to do justice! Who made you a fitter of coats?”

There are too many 'fitters of coats' on a Friday afternoon. Parliament, I would remind my colleagues, was, and should ever remain, the High Court of Justice, not a Petty Court of Pie-powder. Most of those private Members' Bills are watched over by the Home Secretary, who is in charge of police and prisons. It should be his business to play the part of Darius. Unfortunately, neither he nor his officials have clean hands. Their Bills are of a like nature.

'ADMINISTRATIVE' LAW

It is doubtful, indeed, whether the Home Office or the Ministry of Health insert into their draft Acts of Parliament more matters that 'are to be set out hereafter in Rules and Regulations', *i.e.* unchecked by Parliament. It is certain that association with either of these Departments is too apt to develop admiration for the slick efficiency of fascism, which pervades the Departments and invades Parliament.

These 'Rules' having the force of law, yet devised by the Bureaucracy and not by Parliament, have developed into what is called 'Administrative Law'. It has been discussed and described by William Robson¹ and denounced by Lord Hewart in a memorable Philippic.² Such 'law' is of course a step in the direction of fascism, a substitution of departmental, or even corporative, rules for laws enacted by Parliament.

It is brought about by the complications due to the interference of the State with every field of human endeavour. Such interference often involves an attempt to get round natural laws. The attempts result in the natural law hitting back like a punching-ball; every hit back has to be

¹ *Administrative Law*, William Robson.

² *The New Despotism*, Gordon Hewart.

countered by modifications of the 'Rules' and fresh 'Rules' are devised to get round the difficulty. Bills to defeat natural laws cannot be drafted so as to meet unexpected consequences. Therefore either amending Acts are required, or the amending must be done without the trouble of parliamentary sanction. The first involves admission of error by the Department; therefore (and for speed) the second method is preferred by every Department. It leaves the Executive as Autocrat. It is particularly convenient in war-time.

Three different methods of making 'Rules' into law have been invented in the last thirty years.

(1) The Bill gives the Department a free hand, and is generally followed up by the appointment of committees which issue public reports upon which executive action and regulations are based; *e.g.* the Government of India Acts. This does not prevent Parliament from making suggestions for special exemption by means of provisos to the Rules and Regulations Clause. For example: 'Provided nevertheless that women shall have votes on the same terms as men.' Or: 'Provided that no such Rules shall be enacted without the express sanction of Parliament.'

(2) The Bill requires that the Rules and Regulations lie on the Table of the House for a varying number of Parliamentary days before becoming effective. During that time protest *may* be made and time *must* be given for the protest to be debated and voted on.

(3) While lying on the Table, the Government must get the express sanction of the House to the Rules, which generally cannot then be amended by vote of the House.

If some vested interest is affected adversely, that interest can get a chance of airing its grievance. As there are few to look after the general interest, none of these methods of get-

ting round Parliament is of much service to democracy. The only way to ensure democratic control is to modify (3) so that amendments to the Rules should be accepted by the Chair. In that case, save for the absence of a Report stage, the Rules become in effect a further Government Bill.

Any reform of this growing habit of avoiding Parliament should begin by the appointment of a Royal Commission to consider the matter from that angle. It only remains to be said that Parliament has shown itself ever jealous and resentful of these powers given to the Departments; but the Executive has ever connived at the practice and resisted protest from lawyers and democrats on every side of the House.

THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Of those private Members' Bills which do not endanger liberty, most concern the Ministry of Health. For no private Member's Bill may involve any charge upon the taxpayer; thus, if expense is involved, it must fall upon local rates. Therefore such Bills permit, but do not compel, all Local Authorities to enact local by-laws concerning pig-sties, or buildings, or buying of land, or the opening of business as bankers, transporters or landlords. The vested interests on local councils prevent the more risky of these ventures being operated. As, however, my own hardy annual is one of such Bills, I should explain that some of these Ministry of Health measures are liberating rather than authoritarian or penal. The opening of a municipal bank, or of a common wash-house, or of a city tram service, competes with, but need not necessarily suppress, the existing businesses of other people. The consumer reaps a direct advantage from the competition so long as the facist-socialist corporative State allows the competition to continue.

RATING OF LAND VALUES

Completely liberal in this sense is my hardy annual—a Bill to permit all Local Authorities to levy local taxation on a different basis from that employed at present. For at present all local taxes (or rates) in England are levied upon the occupiers of property, measured by the rent paid for the building and any land upon which the building stands. Unused and agricultural land is exempt from such taxation. I desire to levy these rates upon land value alone, and so free from taxation buildings and improvements. The idea is that such taxation on land value discourages owners from keeping land idle or putting it to inferior use, and equally encourages the application of labour and capital to land, and the erection of buildings and improvements. Wherever this method is employed—as in Sydney or Johannesburg—suburban land comes into the market freely and cannot be held up. The British system, of exempting *unused* land from any tax or local rate, allows the owner to lock up such land from use with the greatest ease. As idle land inevitably means idle men, here is one of the main causes of unemployment.

In few countries is local taxation so idiotic as in Great Britain. In America, local taxation is levied on unused as well as used land, and there is a complete valuation of land throughout the New England States. Unfortunately, these townships value also, and tax also, the improvements upon the land, though in some places at a lower poundage than the rate levied upon the land value. The valuation of both land and buildings, showing area and owner, is open to the public, which publicity acts as a perfect check upon bureaucratic injustice. If I hold the British system of democratic rule at Westminster superior to any other, I give the like preference to the township democratic rule of the New

England States. If I were dictator, I would import it and impose it on old England even at the point of the bayonet. But it would need the bayonet to shift some of our landlords.

Therefore my hardy annual, once received with oaths, is now received with laughter, and slaves still hug their fetters.

RESOLUTIONS

I have been writing of the rare opportunities enjoyed (and generally misused) by private Members to make laws. But any Member at any time can get his Bill through first reading and printed for circulation to those who care to agitate for the proposal. The wise M.P., faced by any heckler with such questions as, "Are you in favour of the Douglas Credit Scheme?" or "of eradicating vice and establishing virtue?"—will reply: "Put your ideas in the shape of a Bill and then I shall understand exactly what you want." It is always good for everyone's understanding to draft—or try to draft—a Bill.

It is, however, much easier for the enthusiast to put his ideas into the form of a Resolution, and for the debating of Resolutions there is also a chance of winning a place in the ballot:

—That, in the opinion of this House, socialism is the only remedy for unemployment.

—That, in the opinion of this House, the influence of the Vatican (or the Cabinet) has grown, is growing, and ought to be diminished.

—That, in the opinion of this House, the House of Lords should be abolished.

—That, in the opinion of this House, *women* should have votes (or pay) on the same terms as men.

Anyone can draft Resolutions according to taste and put them on Paper. Then, if lucky in the ballot, he can make a

resounding speech on his pet theory; and anyone who has put down an amendment can also be resonant on the other side—distracting the hunter with a good red-herring. The appropriate Minister or Under-Secretary dances over the subject like an amiable cat on hot bricks, and the Chief Whip puts up a back-bench Member to talk it out if he feels that a vote might be inconvenient.¹ If the Resolution is carried, it can rarely make any difference, unless there is direct censure of some official. In that case, it is either defeated or it is withdrawn on promise of enquiry by the Minister concerned.

ON QUESTIONS AND THE ADJOURNMENT

Question hour, the first hour of each day (except Friday), is the most important feature of Parliament. It is the grand inquest on the bureaucracy, the main chance for democracy to keep officials in check. Every ministerial head of a Department must in turn provide answers to every complaint of official stupidity or injustice that any private Member may choose to bring forward. Some 70 Questions are asked daily, answered officially, and can be followed by supplementary Questions to which the Minister must give uncoached answers. It is in this quick battle of wits that a Minister suffers or shines; while his questioner strives to be intelligible at short notice before the Speaker rises and shuts him up. At times of stress the House becomes riotous with interjections at Question time. Foreign Office Questions during the Spanish Civil War exercised such strong moral influence on Capt. Eden as to determine him to resign. Questioning on internment without trial under Regulation 18B causes Sir Irving Albery to forget the correctitude of the Stock Exchange. But only the rashest man dare ever

¹ If debate is still continuing at eleven of the clock no division can be taken.

put a Supplementary to Mr. Churchill, so quickly does he frame his answer, and rouse the House to laughter against the questioner. There is no better preparation for speaking in the House than by acquiring courage and nimbleness as an impenitent questioner in face of a barracking fire from both sides—which barracking fortunately escapes report.

The baited and exasperated victim of a sense of duty often concludes with: "Mr. Speaker, I beg to give notice that I will raise this matter on the adjournment at the earliest opportunity." (More laughter.) More rarely (and rarely with success), he substitutes "at the end of Questions", for "the earliest opportunity". Then, at the end of Questions, he asks the Speaker's permission "to raise a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely . . ." The occasions when the present Speaker thinks the matter both 'definite' and 'urgent' are indeed rare. "It could have been raised yesterday", or "it can be raised tomorrow", or "hardly definite", suffice. But if he has been talked to beforehand, or thinks a Government statement needed, he may say: "Have you the leave of the House?" Then, if forty Members rise in their place, debate begins at 7:30 on a motion that the House do now adjourn and other business is postponed.

This occurs hardly once a year. But a short debate on the adjournment may take place any night after the end of business, and continue till 11.30 p.m. Business rarely ends before 11 p.m., so that the Member has half an hour to state the case and get an answer from the Minister. As the Minister invariably talks out time, no further reply or debate can take place and no one else can join in. Members drift off home or to their last train at 11 p.m., and few stay to hear the case. A tired and unsympathetic Chief Whip will then hint to a henchman to rise and say: "Mr. Speaker, I beg to call your attention to the fact that there are not

forty Members present." Mr. Speaker rises; the unfortunate has to sit down, his speech undone, while Mr. Speaker remarks: "Attention has been called to the fact that there are not forty Members present." A bell rings all round the premises, while policemen bawl "Count". If the frustrated orator is a good sort, popular, with a good case, Members will come back from passage home to 'make' a House. At the end of two minutes the Speaker stands up and counts aloud those present: "35, 36, 37, 38." Alas, there are no more, and the unfortunate man folds up his undelivered speech, and goes out asking with a scowl: "Who was the blighter who moved that count?"

SUPPLY DAYS

The established and accepted time to criticize the bureaucracy is on the twenty annual occasions when the House discusses the administration of the various Ministries: Treasury, War Office, Admiralty, Air Ministry, Home Office, Board of Trade, Colonial Office, Ministry of Health, India Office, Post Office, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Scottish Office, Board of Education, Mines Department, Pensions Ministry, Dominions Office, Foreign Office, or special war-time ministries of *Economic Warfare, Supply, Aircraft Production, Works and Planning, Fuel, Information, Food, Production*, etc.

We have twenty days a year to discuss these Departments, both policy and administration, but not proposed legislation. The Minister reports on the work of the past year—generally for an hour; then follows a selection of those who are critics and those who are grateful and therefore adulatory. It is difficult, but not impossible, for a back-bench critic to get the chance of a twenty-minute speech.

The Minister, or his Under-Secretary, replies again shortly at the end, when all are yawning and forgetful. Points difficult to answer become so easily forgotten by the end of a debate. Twenty days for such debate and vote are all that Government need give, and criticism by means of Question and Supplementary remains the most effective check upon the bureaucracy.

SHOULD ONE SPECIALIZE?

New Members are always advised to specialize. The large number of Departments (mentioned in the last section), which are available for the exercise of the critical or constructive faculty renders it unlikely that anyone can know each equally well. To attempt such omniscience would mean not being called on to speak, it would not please the Whips, nor even fellow Members. But specialization on one Department is dull, and less useful than piratical raids on many subjects from a special angle. I have specialized on attack from the freedom angle, upon Finance, Colonies, India, Foreign Affairs, Home Office, as well as, professionally, on Army, Navy, and Constitutions. Therefore my average annual contribution of columns to *Hansard*¹ has exceeded that of any other Member of Parliament of the last 36 years. Fortunately, from that point of view, I have been generally in opposition; so that some at least have always welcomed my garrulity. The exasperation of three Mr. Speakers and a dozen Chief Whips has been balanced by the appreciation always shown by a bored House to a fresh point of view. My own exasperation and despair at not being called three times as often as I was should be set against the valuable education one gets preparing speeches, and spotting the logical points of attack and the

¹ The record of parliamentary debates. M.S.

false arguments of others. In my first Parliament, when I prepared my speeches to the extent of writing them out in full and sometimes learning them by heart, I always consoled myself by using the undelivered speech as an article for the Liberal Press, thus securing a substantial solatium, and a place in the most enthralling of professions.

Sir Charles Dilke, that old Parliamentary hand, took a kindly interest in my youthful enthusiasms. He gave me three pieces of advice: (1) Speak in the House once a fortnight; (2) Always be in the House, for Questions and for the quarter hour thereafter, again round 8 o'clock when the change-over takes place, and for the last speech and adjournment; (3) Put two Questions a week and force yourself to put at least one Supplementary to each. For long I followed this practice, thereby picking up much general knowledge and considerable facility, also becoming well known to both sides of the House.

The specialist has a more comfortable life; he gets called on to speak on the rare occasions when he can oblige, he knows his subject; perhaps he gets quicker promotion. Sir Laming Worthington Evans and Dr. Addison both reached Cabinet rank by specializing on National Health Insurance. But I cannot remember any others who 'struck oil' in this manner. Prime Ministers are apt to doubt the value as colleagues of those who exceed the wisdom proper to servants. Probably the parliamentary Member's great decision between specialization and pervasion should depend upon the character, education and ability of the individual. If constructive, painstaking, exact, business-like—choose specialization and you will have a useful, if not a brilliant, career. Widely read, versatile, humane, and of liberal mind—choose the world for your football, but do not imagine that it will be grateful for your choice!

If your ambition is to get on (and I hope it is), there is no real need to make any choice between specialization and omniscience. The best way of getting on in the House of Commons—as in every other sort of society—is to be liked without looking for it, to be earnest in season, to have good manners, with selfishness concealed if not subjugated, and to love your country better than yourself.

BILLS IN STANDING COMMITTEE

It is a commonplace that more work is done in the Committee Rooms than in the Chamber. No Member of Parliament fails to assure his constituents that publicity reaches but a small part of his immense labours. "There are the Committees, you know," he says with mystery.

That mysterious row of 16 Committee Rooms has seen and heard much. In one, throughout a long week, the Catholic Church broke Parnell; in another, the Labour Members of Parliament meet weekly to discuss and decide in secret what ought to be discussed and decided in public; in another, week after week, year after year, sits an immortal Public Accounts Committee, ever cross-examining the Civil Servants, and ever backing up the watch-dogs of the Treasury. One may be buried for life in the Public Accounts Committee with consciousness of virtue as one's only consolation. Other Members of Parliament equally devoted, acquire a reputation for impartiality and the judicial mind. These, I believe, sit ever on Private Bill Committees, examining plans, hearing expert evidence and the princes of the parliamentary bar, and attempting to secure uniformity of practice from Thurso to Torquay.

Should you be one of those amiable benefactors of mankind who are unable to say, "No, I am too busy!" you will besiege the Sergeant-at-Arms Office to book a Committee

Room for the virtuous people who haunt the Central Hall in the interests of every phase of humanity. You will then purchase House of Commons stationery, and agree to sign a whip to such of your fellow Members as the lobbying gentlemen (or ladies) consider reliable, asking them to attend in Committee Room X on such and such day and hour, to hear a distinguished outsider explain the situation. Few come, but those who have signed the whip feel bound to desert the Chamber (or the Smoking Room) and receive enlightenment. Thereafter you tell the lobby journalists just enough—or sometimes too much—to secure the right publicity for the cause of the moment. Frequently the meeting ends with an attempted deputation to the Prime Minister, whose private secretary will foist you off upon a stone-walling colleague.

There are also Select Committees, Joint Committees, and even Royal Commissions, meeting in that familiar row—but the great work is on Standing Committee on Government Bills, with the Minister in charge of his Bill, and reporters sharpening their pencils.

Government Bills, as well as private Members' Bills, undergo scrutiny and amendment before some 50 Members of Parliament from both sides, on one or other of the Standing Committees. The Committee Clerks flank the Chairman on the dais and guide him on points of procedure. Two Ministers and perhaps a Law Officer lead the government forces from the right, the opposition face them across the floor as in the Chamber. Civil Servants and draftsmen are present to coach the Minister.

So rare are liberating proposals, that I start with a general desire to oppose new laws and support the repeal of most old ones. Therefore I can always approach Standing Committee with a clear conscience. I have little interest

or belief in the success of the measure; but I feel it my duty to attempt to point out its worst defects. To do this with understanding one must attend the debate on the Second Reading and discover who wants it and why. One soon discovers that the public has an interest in the opposite direction. A few hours must then be spent on drafting amendments to the Bill in this opposite direction—amendments in which you can believe and for which you can put up a case. The amendments must make sense and appear at the earliest possible place in the Bill, lest one finds the point already decided. They must be in order, appropriate to the short title of the Clause and involve no expense outside the Money Resolutions. The Chairman will always say if they should come later on or be drafted as a New Clause.

Armed with these amendments, and the case for them, one can make with appealing sincerity a case for liberty and justice as against benevolence and expediency; it may exasperate the bureaucracy but must educate one's colleagues. In many cases one only 'moves' in order to get an explanation. As one can speak repeatedly on Committee, the explanation must be given and is often very revealing of the interests behind the measure. If the Bill is based on the Report of some commission, it is just as well to glance through the evidence besides reading the Report itself.

The most amusing Standing Committee Bills which I remember were: Small Holdings and Allotments; Housing, Town Planning, etc.; Films Quota; Public Companies; Tithe Redemption; Mental Deficiency; Asylums; and Moneylenders. My opposition to the last won for me a grateful offer of £100 "for any charity in which you are interested", so I thought it better to cease my opposition. After the Committee stage, the Bill goes back to the House for Report and Third Reading. It is quite useless to attempt to fight a Bill on Report

unless one has fought it in Committee; but in old days, before the Speaker could select amendments, I once kept the House up two nights running, almost single-handed, on the pleasant subject of that Mental Deficiency which they found so hard to define. Many Government Bills have their Committee stage not in Standing Committee but on the floor of the House. But then the Government can force closure by compartments (*alias* the Gag), in which case Party solidarity substitutes dull reiteration for reasoned debate.

POLITICAL ECONOMY

All Finance Bills and most Board of Trade Bills can always be made into platforms for Freedom of Trade, and I have never found any Bill which did not open the door to the Land Question. Once any man is soundly grounded on Free Trade, he can rout every opponent. But few nowadays understand the 'fundamentals' of political economy. Thirty years ago, every political economist was at least a free trader, every political meeting was dominated by the issue, first principles took the place of statistics, and the exact meaning of 'the balance of trade' became a battleground. The postwar depression and deflation broke the Liberal economists, and substituted for them those 'God's-sakers', who cry to Government, 'For God's sake *do* something and stop arguing'.

For thirty years a whole generation of electors had been thoroughly educated in economics. It all went with the wind, and the stoutest champions, such as McKenna, Mond, and Runciman,¹ went over to the stupid enemy. Only those firmly founded on the doctrines of Henry George survived to jeer at the pathetic flounderings of statesmen who built bat-

¹ Prominent members of the Liberal Party and government office holders in the 1920's. M.S.

tleships to help the poor, and imagined that they reduced unemployment by putting skilled engineers on to making roads. All cried, "The State must do something"—and nobody knew what. Till at last we slipped off gold, and a depreciated currency provided an automatic tax on imports blessedly accompanied by an equal and opposite bounty on exports. The beauties of inflation are now fully recognized, but what is at the end of the slope down which we rush? There is certainly no compulsory unemployment now!

I venture to think that the modern Member of Parliament teaches less political economy to his electors than they did in my generation. It will be needed again, if democracy and the rule of reason is not to succumb to bureaucracy, price-fixing, subsidies, and fascism. Once, in anger, I told G. B. Shaw that his revolution would put me first up against the wall for shooting. He said, "Oh no! We should put you under a glass case to go on talking." That was just his benevolence and fine toleration; and, possibly, a certain contempt for reason. Whatever the results to themselves, Members of Parliament who have seen the light had better go on talking.

OFFICE

Can politicians not also act, as well as talk and educate? Let us pursue the career of our young politician in the 'Talking Shop'. He has ambitions, beyond even the most useful criticism. Keen-witted men go far in politics, once they are among the great rulers. He may be intemperate, as I was in the Good Parliament of 1906, and yet advance to higher things, after becoming known as a good all-round debater. From leader of a commando, may he not become leader of a people? He has become popular, not unpopular, by espousing unpopular causes. He is a power on the platform, sent down

by his Party to by-elections. The Prime Minister speaks to him in the lobby, his wife is ever on the Terrace or in the Gallery. He has the good sense not to depreciate others; he laughs with, not at, the elders of the Party. Should he cash in?

All aspirants to those Cabinet offices (and salaries) have to pass through some half-dozen years of comparative silence and oblivion, during the incubation period as Under-Secretaries. They may read out answers to Questions written by others, even answer during Question hour for other Departments than their own. On rare occasions they may introduce a departmental Bill, or preside over a departmental enquiry. They learn the working of the Office. But they may never do what they like, and there is the constant humiliation of finding that the permanent officials are more in the confidence of the chief than is the Parliamentary Under-Secretary. It is not till one reaches the Cabinet that one can once more have a say in the general policy of the Government. Thus it comes about that though few would refuse a junior appointment, if offered, many would not trouble to seek such office. I hated being muzzled in the House during the year I held a small post in the Cabinet; I felt exactly as though I had lost my seat.

THE ROTATION OF PARTIES

It is not usually recognized that, however important is the part played by the Executive in Parliament, criticism of the acts of this Executive is really more enjoyable—possibly useful, even if less well paid. That some such criticism has become essential to the proper working of democracy is shown by the salary now paid to the Leader of His Majesty's opposition. Whether that salary conduces to more effective criticism is a disputed point.

This criticism is precisely what constitutes government by reason, and the great virtue of Parliament is that there are always some to find fault with the Government of the day and keep a check upon its actions.

While there are two parties alternately in power, one gets this effective criticism at its best; and the best critics will be chosen for office as soon as the wheel of fortune turns. In such circumstances the critic has ever to remember that it may soon be his turn to be criticized. That makes for moderation, not only in promises.

When I first entered the House, in 1906, I thought that there could never be a Conservative Government in power again, so overwhelming had been the Liberal victory. Surely the swing of the pendulum had come to an end! Yet from 1916 onwards to this very day, with two short intervals, Conservative Governments have been all-powerful. With less chance of (or wish for) power, Labour Party criticism has become less responsible, and political career in Parliament has changed—a career is no longer critical *and* official, but critical *or* official. For those in the governing Party there is no chance of winning experience as a critic or spurs as a future Minister. For the opposition Party (if any) there is less experience of office, less fear of having to deliver the recklessly promised goods.

If the useful functions of Parliament are not to deteriorate under the present united rule, Prime Minister, Speaker, and Chief Whip must give extended opportunities for criticism and encourage it among their own obedient followers. For without criticism and debate the virtue goes out from Parliament and democracy; the rule of reason abdicates to the unchecked rule of force. It is not enough to vote down criticism and reason; a United Government can always do that; Ministers must convince by reason, and welcome every

opportunity of expounding their reason. The bureaucracy must face publicity, for that is the only check on inefficiency and corruption. Among the bureaucracy I class the Fighting Services, which too often prefer to conceal 'for the honour of the Army', rather than to punish, for the improvement of the Service.

There is more need today than ever for a politician who shall understand what must be the services rendered by Parliament for the preservation of the virtues of democracy. Never did such work more need unselfishness, as well as courage.