

## CHAPTER NINE

### IS DEMOCRACY INEFFICIENT?

*"There comes a cry most appealing to youth: give us more efficiency; get something done; stop this long-drawn-out parliamentary and congressional debate; act!—and they say to us 'Look at Italy!'"*

NICHOLAS MURRAY BUTLER, 1934.

THERE is no yardstick by which we may measure inefficiency. But the more the spotlight of publicity is thrown upon any government, the less inefficiency there is and the more inefficiency is seen. We naturally judge by what we can see and without publicity we can see nothing. Even if we feel personally the clashing of the cogs of the machine, without the power to make public, we were wiser to keep our feelings to ourselves, for where there is no publicity there are always police. Thus *ipso facto* the dictator escapes both criticism and publicity. 'He' has only to say he is efficient, and to publish selected evidence. Meanwhile democracy's faults are exposed to all of us.

Dictatorship ought to be most efficient in preparing for and waging war. After all, war is the dictator's business. War is alien to a democratic and educated people. It is not surprising that, at war, educated people show inefficiency. It requires defeat upon defeat before America, Britain, China, or even Russia, can change their amateurishness.

#### INEFFICIENCY OF THE SERVICES

Whether under a dictator or a responsible government, the machine is in fact managed by the Civil and Military Services. The problem therefore which we have to face is

this: which best controls and stimulates the bureaucracy, a dictator or a many-headed government responsible to Parliament?

Broadly speaking, the efficiency or inefficiency of all service depends upon the fear of reprimand felt by the servant, qualified by his willingness to take risks in the interests of his service. 'Safety first' is the worst and most usual counsellor for all servants. A rash servant no doubt makes mistakes and is 'fired'; a wise servant waits for orders, and is guilty of no mistakes. Reluctance to make decisions is therefore natural, both in the services and in business; and the further away the directing head, the more delay there must be, the less the directing head will know of the matter in question, and the more inefficient will be the service or business.

The managing director of a limited company, secure in his position, is such a directing head. (No doubt he keeps a Board of Directors to help him say 'No'; but normally they leave most decisions to him.) The owner of a private business has all the right, and power, of decision. Both these 'heads' are reasonably close to the matters to be decided; both can delegate decision within the limits they lay down. On such delegation the success of the business depends. Bernard Baruch, most successful of business men, is supposed to have explained his success thus: "I tell my young men what I want, and then put my feet on the desk and read the newspaper."

#### THE PRIME MINISTER

The managing director of the Services is the Prime Minister, not quite so secure as the managing director with a contract, or as the head of a private firm, perhaps not so secure as a Dictator; but only the House of Commons can

dictate to him. Final decisions have to be his; he must ever decide, ten times a day, between those rivals 'Safety First' and 'Rashness'—between Discretion and Valour. He too will delegate much to the Parliamentary Heads of Departments—some policy and much action. Lord Baldwin, in my opinion, delegated too much, Mr. Churchill perhaps too little. Mr. Gladstone . . .

No! It is not really a question of how much the Prime Minister delegates. The amount really depends, not on what the Prime Minister wishes, but on how much his Ministers are afraid of him. They were terribly afraid of Mr. Gladstone; they are afraid of Mr. Churchill. Each one he removes leaves the rest more afraid—unless he can get it into their heads that the victims were removed (and will be removed) not because they acted without consulting him, but because they *did* consult and *should* have themselves decided. If you want initiative and decision, you must 'sack' those who are afraid of you. It is the 'yes-men' and 'noddors' who create inefficiency.

What I have said about Prime Ministers and business heads applies equally to Department Chiefs. They must be feared for the right reason, if the sub-department chiefs are to make decisions on their own. This action is hardly ever taken; for it is also human nature to get as much power as possible for oneself, and the stupid human animal, thinking mainly of his dignity and power, objects to delegating authority. Discipline enters into the picture, and thought goes out; the more as one goes lower down. But the foreman who oils the wheels himself is a fool. Ultimate efficiency comes from the encouragement of freedom; inefficiency from discipline and ignorance—from fear of the 'boss' and of taking action.

## INEFFICIENCY OF DICTATORS

If all agree, as they should, with this analysis of the cause of inefficiency, it is clear that a dictatorship should breed an inefficient public service—more inefficient than a democracy. For everybody under a dictator must fear—fear to delegates and fear to decide. The dictator cannot be omniscient. He must also be limited in choice of his servants, limited to those personally loyal to himself, not always the most ready thinkers. So it goes on, all down the ladder. Nor is there any spotlight on the conduct of any of his subordinates, save the secret police reports. A free rein to jealousy, suspicion and favouritism must destroy the morale and efficiency of any service.

When Hitler dismisses half a dozen Generals, what are the feelings of the others and of those who take their place? Fear of the same fate. How avoid it? By blaming others, and obeying orders—however inappropriate under changed circumstances. Balaclava was magnificent; but, as somebody remarked, it was not war! It is not obeying orders, but disobeying orders which marks the true soldier. Initiative is never encouraged by fear. Napoleon's method was sensible. He dismissed Generals who lost battles, saying in reply to the most convincing explanations of innocence: "I cannot afford to keep Generals who are unfortunate, because their misfortune affects the confidence of their men." The test was simple—not 'was it your fault?', but 'was it a misfortune?'

## NEW DEPARTMENTS

Good officers, proud of their profession, full of the tradition of enterprise, will, however, often rise above considerations of 'safety first'. That is probably the secret weapon of German military success. It is certainly our naval tradi-

tion, and explains our Empire. But for that success, the officers must have pride in their profession and well-selected traditions. Pride in the profession of serving in the Ministry of Transport and a knowledge of its noble traditions cannot be acquired in a day. Ministries of mushroom growth are not the Treasury, nor even the Board of Trade. As we descend to such murky shallows as the Ministry of Food, we can hardly expect to find corporate pride, the team spirit, or even the loyalty to risk rebuke in the interests of the service. There 'caution', 'safety first', and 'reference back' will rule supreme. A shiver passes through the whole office when a newspaper man is reported on the threshold. I hasten to add that I know nothing of Lord Woolton's department; this is a purely imaginary reconstruction (as of a dinosaur from a knuckle-bone) and intuition.

The point I wish to make is that the newest and more inexperienced Departments will not have 'a clean slate' and therefore move swiftly. The absence of precedents and of a certain definite hierarchy produce the inefficiency of a Ministry of Information. A dull intellect could take on the job of President of the Board of Education. His experienced officials know the ropes, have an *esprit de corps*, are co-operating rather than competing; they have definite work to do, and no time to worry about whether they can conscientiously hold on to a job whose services nobody seems to require. But it requires a genius to take charge of a new Department, and construct it, and dovetail new men into a harmonious machine. He must wring necks and shake hands almost simultaneously to produce anything like a loyal team anxious to achieve a collective success.

That is why any visitor inspecting a new Department should cast his eye round the office walls for a chart-diagram showing how authority is delegated, and the hierarchy of

reference. That is why the new Minister of such new Department should summon all officials on the chart and lecture them collectively. He should outline what they should decide and what refer to him—threatening dire penalties on those who will not decide and prefer to evade. He should invite and answer all questions, even with the frank admission, "We shall soon find out." Then he should do the same with all the second in command of the various sections, to clear his mind, to give them hope of promotion, and to discover the best material for promotion. They are all new boys at a new school, and so is the Minister—all finding out for the first time and feeling their feet.

Unfortunately, every department is full of officials with too little work to do—their ambition to grab work from the others. All dig themselves into a new unconnected trench of their own. The only cure I know is a Treasury demand for a 10 per cent reduction in cost, either by reducing all salaries or getting rid of 10 per cent of the staff. Let the Minister decide; it will generally result in a reduction of staff, and always in an increase of efficiency.

Whether under a dictatorship or under a democracy, the ambition of youth and age is a Government job, and once in that job, to hold it. It can best be held by becoming a specialist with records. As soon as it is said, "Oh, So-and-so knows all about rabbits," he has his little niche. The next step for him is to acquire a staff, and add dormice to rabbits. As soon as he has a well-paid staff, then—to use an expression familiar to the French bureaucracy, '*renvoyez l'ascenseur*', i.e. send down the lift again, for a rise in the specialist's own salary to match that of his assistants. Nothing can stop the cocoon winding its own protection, except publicity and the vigilance of the Minister and the Treasury.

Now there is no publicity under a dictatorship, and less vigilance if the official is 'of the party'; none at all if he has a brother in the Secret Police. Possibly for a time, under the inspiration of a new faith, officials may cease to be human and seek only the advantage of the State. That rarely happens even here, and I cannot imagine it happening in Italy or Germany. Anything seems possible in Russia, even to an official admitting to his chief that his typist could do his job.

#### PROFESSIONAL OR AMATEUR?

"But," chorus the Fascists, "look at the German roads, look at the Pontine marshes; the Italian trains run to time, the German Army is the most efficient in the world. Their education of the young man in your judgment be damnable, but you can't say it is not efficient."

Those are the results which are shown and advertised. I do not know—I do not suppose anyone does—whether equal efficiency pervades all services in Germany and Italy. But I think one reason for greater efficiency in Germany than here may be that we are amateurs while Germans are professionals. That is certainly true of the Army officers. Ever since warfare became a science it has needed exceptional Generals—Cromwell, Marlborough, Clive and Wellington—to enable us to win land battles.

It may also be true of Civil Administration and business management. The German *Bürgermeister*, head of all city management, is not an amateur Mayor chosen annually, but a permanent trained official. There are probably text-books and university lectures for budding *Bürgermeister*s; possibly no one can become *Bürgermeister* without a university degree in Town Mastership. I know of no text-books or degrees here, whether for Mayors or Town Clerks. From the sublime

to the ridiculous, I know of no dissertation on 'How a Minister of the Crown should build up a New Department of State' to equal the instructional and thought-provoking suggestions of this chapter! But I have no doubt that Nazi professors have produced text-books on Bureaux of far greater thoroughness. There are excellent books in English on Business Management; but it is doubtful whether one managing director in ten has ever read them. We find our own way, at considerable expense to our country. No doubt by finding our own way we learn the job of management better in the end, provided the end does not arrive in 'sticky' fashion before the job is learnt.

There is a good deal in being 'a gentleman'; but there is no sound ground for supposing that a gentleman must be ignorant. He can acquire the merits of the professional without sacrificing decent feelings. The Fascists, clamouring for dictatorship and efficient state-management, seek to turn gentlemen into professionals, without preserving the English gentleman's decency or honesty. It must take many generations of Quisling rule before Englishmen will do the goose-step with both efficiency and pride. If we have to choose between the two futures—Fascism and efficiency *or* freedom and pride—the dumb Anglo-Saxon gentleman will prefer the latter. But I see no reason for forcing any such preference. In the long run, dictatorship, censorship, police and favouritism must destroy any book-learnt efficiency and must produce corruption and decay—even in the German Army. Jena followed within 20 years the death of Frederick the Great.

#### FROM PERICLES TO STALIN

The lesson of history is everywhere the same. The free democracies of Greece were replaced by tyrants and fear. The free cities of Italy sank under tyrants and fear. In each



case it took many years before the virtues of freedom died out, but fear did kill them in the end. Corruption grew with luxury; the arts died of sycophancy; inefficiency rotted government. How should it be otherwise, if Britain, Holland and America followed Greece, Lombardy and Rome into tyranny? In each of the three classical cases it was the longing for a 'strong' government inspired by fear which swept away popular rule. Sometimes it was fear of outside aggression, and sometimes fear of internal dissensions and revolts, which produced the change. Ever it was the insecurity of property. We see exactly the same factors operating in our last remaining free countries. Fear of revolution in the German Reich produced Ebert, Hitler and the Nazi cult; the same fear in Italy produced Mussolini and Fascism; fear of unemployment and the insecurity of privilege operates to create Mosley and Father Coughlin and whoever it was or is in Spain, Montreal, Argentina, Portugal, Venezuela and Greece.

Each time we get the same cause—fear; the same denunciation of free institutions; the same demand for strong government; and the same cry of inefficiency, corruption and injustice. Every grievance is pointed out as the fault of Government; all will be righted by the beneficent dictator; 'spoils to the victors' will but redress past spoliation.

There was one country where Government was not democratic, and never had been. There corruption and injustice reigned supreme; there inefficiency was so exposed in the last war that Czarist dictatorship broke hopelessly before the revolutionary Party rule of the Bolsheviks. Whatever the victorious Party did could not have been worse than that which went before. As it were by the act of God, two succeeding dictators happened to have an altogether altruistic and fiery faith in Communism. With no vested interests in

the way, working on a clean slate, but working up from nothing, Lenin and Stalin produced and educated a new world of miraculous morale, where, at present, most civic, even Christian virtues find their zenith. It is this new world which is now, by its morale, saving the old. But, when the war is won and peace returns, such virtues cannot endure under a dictatorship. I believe Stalin sees this danger, and for that reason started those trial trips of a free representative assembly, elected on the English model by equal electoral districts. If, before he dies, he can establish such an institution in the affections of the Soviet people, he will save them from the risks which will inevitably follow his demise or disappearance. The Age of the Antonines lasted two generations. May he remember that the Antonines were followed by Commodus.

In any case, let not the one existing good dictatorship blind us to the fact that all others have destroyed democracy; and that in doing so they have increased, not decreased, corruption, inefficiency and injustice. Government of the bureaucracy, by the bureaucracy, for the bureaucracy, is the only alternative to that which 'shall not perish from the earth'.

#### PERIL THROUGH FEAR

One word more on these other dictatorships which we have escaped. The Fascist Party could never have won on grievances and election abuse alone. In every case they have had behind them not only the money, but the weapons that money can buy—Press, Police and Army. That money came from the wealthy who feared the people—feared Socialism or Communism, and had little love or understanding of democracy. Against this towering crashing wave of propaganda, those who love freedom have had only feeble reason

and old traditions to oppose. Until Britain was pushed over the brink into war against dictators on September 3, 1939, the Fascist onrush was welcomed by those who should have protected us and who had all but sunk the good old cause. Whatever be the result of this war, it can hardly be worse than that from which we barely escaped in September 1939; and at the worst, before Freedom dies, she will have a decent curtain.

That this almost universal fear, possessing the governing class and driving them to abandon democracy, has not sunk us before now, we owe mainly to those who finally forced us into active war. Had we not broken away from appeasement, had we not by violent war bound patriotism to the cause of Freedom, democracy had now been dead and our people slaves.

In the cloister reason may answer fear; but for the mass reason alone is not enough, even in the steady Protestant world of Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians. The desertion of all our traditions and ethical standards by the bulk of the educated and governing class came at a time when the eyes of the working class were still closed. That danger was immense in 1939, but they are closed no longer. Propaganda has swung round to denunciation of tyranny and inhumanity; the Church has rallied to liberty; Fascism has ceased to be fashionable. Above all, the object lesson of the immense morale of the Russian 'proletariat' has enlightened mankind, of all classes and parties. The revolution in our governing class, the love-day between labour and capital, is well illustrated by the almost hysterical welcome of Sir Stafford Cripps to power. One may observe the claims made by all party partisans that he is really at once a Conservative, a Liberal, a Socialist, and a Communist. I am content that he is a good son of Parliament, and independent of every Party.

If our survival as a free people is due mainly to Russian courage and example, only revealed at last in December of 1941, let not those who love democracy forget the luck which saved the cause for the preceding eight years. If freedom had to have deadly enemies, could she have chosen more happily than Mussolini, Hitler, Mosley, Franco, Quisling, Laval and 'Father' Coughlin? Had she had to choose her paladins, she might have chosen better Generals, but could she have chosen statesmen more inspiring and resolute than Chiang Kai-shek, Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin? Luck, as well as reason and example, have been on our side, but it is not altogether luck that throws up fools among the Fascists and men among democracy.

Fascists have, however, infected another body of slightly more intelligent people with this idea of the inefficiency of Parliament. Socialist, Communist and syndicalist youth, of the 'For-God's-sake' type, clamour for legislation to *make* a new world. They see Parliament as an obstructive body of old men blocking the way. "Get something done!" they cry. "Act! Enact!" They have, or had, a plan. When the Labour Party got a real majority, they would pass an Enabling Act putting the power of devising laws in the hands of their new Government without all the paraphernalia of three readings, Committee and Report stages in two Houses of Parliament. No debate! Act!

This is, of course, a wide extension of Administrative Law, taking the power of making law from the hands of Parliament and putting it into the hands of the Departments. They see Parliament as a machine for making laws—do not distinguish between Parliament and Government, do not understand the role of Parliament as a check on Government.

For a free Parliament is not a machine for making laws; it is a machine for *preventing* Government from making laws.

It is the only check upon the Departments—perhaps not the only check so long as there remains a free Press. But a free Press could not endure here, any more than in Russia, once the Departments had power to draft, enact and enforce laws without leaving power to amend or reject in Parliament.

What would happen at the present time were the Government empowered to enact without consulting Parliament? Just think what the Home Office, or Board of Trade, or Ministry of Food would do to us if there were no Parliament to check their enterprise! The Press would not dare to call its type its own. The vested interests, which include the Services, through private interviews with Ministers and officials, would have it all their own way. That is a dictatorship; that is Fascism; the Police State.

Thanks to private Members of Parliament, we can control the appetite of bureaucracy to control us. We can prevent and amend their laws. So we should think of Parliament as a reasoning machine for stopping laws being made by Government—that is by the bureaucrats. The ignorant critics think of Parliament as a machine for making laws. Thank heaven it is not! My personal opinion is that there are already too many laws and regulations and officials—and even gaols. I would use publicity and public opinion much more, and law much less, especially for unsocial offences, such as black-marketing, looting, slacking, shoplifting and profiteering. Publish their names and addresses, label their houses, and put them in the pillory for 24 hours!

The Departments would no doubt like to put Parliament on the shelf, and retain a government unhampered by Parliament. Certainly the War Office and Colonial Office have 'had about enough' of Parliament. No doubt the Government itself always prefers that Parliament should adjourn for long holidays. But neither the free Press nor the free electors

care for Parliament to be put into cold storage and to have to face Government alone. Parliament and Government are not the same thing. One is a check upon the other; and both need to be efficient—one restraining by reason, the other executive by force.