

CHAPTER TEN

PARTY AND DISCIPLINE

"The man who will not investigate both sides of a question is dishonest."

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

WE have considered the dangers to democracy in general, and to our parliamentary form of Government in particular—caused by place-men, corruption in public life and inefficiency in Government. All these lead the benevolent to blaspheme and provide food for Fascists.

Let us now consider the danger arising out of Party solidarity and discipline; whither Party violence leads, or has led, in other lands, and in other times. Obviously Party has much to do with all the vices and dangers already described: as, obviously, Fascist 'order' or Bolshevik rule is Party rule.

HISTORY OF PARTY

There has been no history or study of Party growth in England. Mr. Keith Feiling has published a *History of the Tory Party* covering a century and a half. But a history of Party growth in England—its organization, regulations and corruptions—has been and will remain impossible till the *History of Parliament* is finished. At present one can only say that ever since it started in 1265, every House of Commons has contained two Parties—those who were for and those who were against the King's Ministers of the time. Neither Party had much cohesion and those against the Ministers waited wisely for a lead. Neither Party had principles, save loyalty to some magnate with whom they were

connected by blood, neighbourhood or patronage. All used violence rather than argument.

The patron-magnate, whether lay or clerical, sat mostly in the Upper Chamber; and the clients in the Lower House probably boarded at the magnate's Inn. The policy and party of the magnate were determined by his personal relations with the King's Ministers.

For the first two hundred years of Parliament the magnates and their purely selfish parties were alone of importance. But the frequent opposition of magnates to the King and the King's Ministers served to secure for Parliament the right to impeach Ministers and for the Commons power to check taxation. Eight times Parliament changed the Ministers (1315, 1326, 1376, 1388, 1399, 1450, 1455, 1461); five times it dethroned Kings (1326, 1399, 1461, 1470, 1471). The Lords Ordainers, the Lords Appellant, York and Lancaster, were all definite parties with their adherents or servants in either House of Parliament. From 1377 onwards the King's hold upon the Commons was strengthened by the presence in the House of many of his servants; and the Opposition Lords saw to it that their servants were there also.

But this was violent partisanship, rather than a principled party—an affair of the upper classes. The Members for the Cities of London and York might take sides; but the ordinary burgesses, who constituted the mass of the House of Commons, usually avoided such dangerous sport and conformed in each Parliament to the side in the ascendant. Popular feeling there was, chiefly anti-French and pro-war; but those elected to Westminster were mainly interested in avoiding taxation and in attempting to make the King live 'on his own'. Acts of Resumption of grants made to the

King's friends became a normal way of securing both economy and vengeance.

PARTY BASED ON PRINCIPLES

The anarchy of the Wars of the Roses left the magnates in ruins and the Crown supreme. The King and his Parliament now blessed and helped each other, largely at the expense of the Church. The new solidarity of the Kingdom had reached completion by the death of Henry VIII (1547). A very short struggle of Protestant against Catholic was followed by the present and perpetual struggle between Conformists and Non-conformists, which was the foundation of Parties based on public policy and private principle. They might call themselves Catholic and Puritan, or Court and Country, or Cavalier and Roundhead, or Abhorrrers and Exclusionists, or Tory and Whig, or Conservative and Liberal—but there was ever a Right and a Left Party in both Houses and in the country.

If I were asked to date the genesis of political Parties in England I would say 1553, when John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, first beat upon the Protestant drum and got a House of Commons to his taste. Before 1620, no organized attempt took place to get constituencies to elect Members because of their views on public policy. Even down to the Revolution of 1688 the personality of the candidate, and not the Party label, remained the chief issue at every election. Till then no Whig called himself Whig, and no Tory, Tory; those were the terms of abuse used by the other side. So today all the Tory Press label the Labour M.P.s not 'Labour', but 'Socialist'; and I speak of the 'Tory' Press, whereas *The Times* would like to call itself 'the accredited organ of the National Government'.

From the Whig Revolution of 1688 to the Hanoverian succession in 1714, Whig and Tory fought remorselessly in every constituency with the slightest claim to a free electorate. Each new House of Commons purged itself of its defeated opponents by sham election petitions which the House decided on Party lines. But though the mob knew whether it was 'red' (Tory) or 'orange and blue' (Whig), I have found no trace of anything in the nature of a Party Whig before the time of George III, when the handful of Whig M.P.s were urged by letters from their leader to attend for some special debate. In fact, till the great Reform Bill abolished rotten boroughs (1832), not half the constituencies enjoyed the remunerative pleasure of going to the poll at any general election; and no list of the Members elected would show each man's Party label. Each Member's party affiliation has to be discovered from his votes in Parliament, until Dod's *Guide* first appeared in 1835; and even Dod, as late as 1859, is often content to give the label 'Liberal-Conservative', or 'Reformer'.

PARTY ORGANIZATION

The national organization of the Conservative Party started in 1867; the national organization of the Liberals did not become effective till Schnadhorst organized Birmingham about 1876, and my uncle Stuart Rendel did the same by Wales in 1880-5. The Labour Representation Committee started work in 1900 and the 'Labour Party' finally united Socialist and Trade Unionist in 1910. I doubt if the use of the expression 'Chief Whip' for the Patronage Secretary to the Treasury can be traced before 1880, and I feel certain that neither Mr. Gladstone nor Mr. Parnell would ever have countenanced the vulgarity. Lord Richard Grosvenor was always spoken of by name; his successor, Arnold Morley,

was called 'Chief Whip'. When I was born there were no daily 'whips' or 'whips' office', nor party endorsement of candidates, nor P.P.S.s to arrange tea on the Terrace, nor party funds to print posters—and gentlemen of the House of Commons spoke little, questioned little, came down to the House after dinner, and behaved with the decorum of the present House of Lords.

All this changed about 1880. The general election of that year was the first occasion of the publication of a map of England showing the political parties returned for each constituency. Mr. Gladstone's Parliament, 1880-5, was the first in which Party discipline developed, and Party 'whips' began to be sent out with regularity. The power was first given to Mr. Speaker to closure debate, March 18, 1887. These developments were caused by the obstructionist tactics of the Irish Party under Mr. Parnell. Parnell had succeeded Mr. Isaac Butt in 1878, and had determined to stop parliamentary government until the Act of Union was repealed. It was a way of blackmailing democracy. This closure of debate, and creation of rigid Party discipline, not only among Parnell's own followers, but among Government supporters, was the first grave blow at parliamentary democracy.

This short excursus into history is necessary to show how ancient are differences of opinion between Englishmen who are met together to argue and to reason; and how recent and upstart is the Party machine in our conception of Government. The various Senates, Parliaments or Assemblies which arose abroad like mushrooms in the 19th century split up at once into well-defined and logical Parties. Only the American Congress adopted by chance, and adhere to with wisdom, Party labels which have no relation to Left or Right politics. The differences between the 'Greens' and the 'Blues' of the Byzantine hippodrome were not less defined or more bitter

than the differences today between Republican and Democrat. But the orderly and logical German Reichstag had from its very start in 1871 each grade of political thought tied up and docketed in its appropriate pigeon-hole or sheep-pen—Conservative, National Liberal, *Centrum*, *Freisinnige*, Social-Democrat, etc. The Continent had no background of independence of Party and individual dignity. It is to that background of individual dignity that we might so easily revert if we could expose and destroy the domination of Party bosses. Indeed, it is in that direction that we must move if Party violence is not to destroy democracy.

The Liberal Party and its organization are dead; but Liberalism survives, not alone in the Labour Party. Twenty-five years of Tory rule has resulted in honeycombing the Tory Party in the House of Commons with men of Liberal mind, who would in other days have sat as Liberals. Now they sit uncomfortably yoked to some local caucus of grumbling, inadequately instructed Colonel Blimps. These Tory caucuses are mostly Fascist in their sympathies, but their representatives in the House move increasingly in the other direction. The rebellion of the Commons on May 8, 1940, was an exasperated revolt against their Party masters—against all of them, from David Margesson in the Whips' Office to the octogenarian caucus chairman at Bumpkin Hall who desired from his Member only adequate contributions to the Party fund and complete confidence in Mr. Chamberlain. The Conservative organization is not yet liquidated, but, outside the machine, many of its victims hold it worthy of liquidation.

A growing member of Labour electors and Members of Parliament feel the same about their Party Organization. When the last war ended, the shattered Labour Party, shorn of its leaders, survived in opposition to the great coalition,

put up a good fight, and won through as the only surviving group of radicals. But in 1919 the great Trade Union leaders were not sharing in the Coalition Government and had no responsibility for it. Then, the Communists of Russia were a despised and impotent body of aliens. When the next peace comes, the position of the Labour Party may well be that of the Liberal Party in 1919. May the result of their rigid and undemocratic rules and expulsions be a warning to their communist successors on the Left! Neither dictators nor dictatorial Parties can survive indefinitely in the atmosphere of free Parliaments.

PARTIES AND PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

Alternating Liberal and Conservative Governments (the rotatory system of Spain) lead to rigid Parties under whips and caucuses. Therefore we may see one merit in the present One-Party rule—it breaks Party discipline, develops initiative and sacrifice, and inspires the public to demand independence. To preserve their Party, the Liberals demanded Proportional Representation in 1918; to preserve theirs, the Labour Party will presently make the same demand. All over the Continent, while Parliament endured, Party machines demanded, and often obtained, Proportional Representation. To preserve their Parties they destroyed their Parliament. Party machines are not so popular in England that we should even wish to preserve them—much less do so by the sacrifice of our responsibility to our constituents. Who would want to represent Party, when he might represent Newcastle-under-Lyme!

As a cynic, as well as an optimist, I can assure those who fear we may sink through Party into Fascism that there is no possibility of P.R. ever becoming law in Great Britain. It is not because intelligent people distrust Parties. The

reason is much more conclusive. At present each individual Member of Parliament has a freehold property in his seat, which he has no intention of giving up for a doubtful place on a Party List.

The same almost ferocious resentment would be felt by the constituencies. Does anyone suppose that the electors of the aforesaid ancient Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme would tolerate being merged in Stoke-on-Trent, and enjoy having a fifth share in electing five Members? To have the town's own representative in Parliament is the town's valuable privilege; just as valuable as is the seat to that representative. For that reason, no syndicalist or fascist or totalitarian substitute for our Parliament, however truly representative on paper of the interests of producers or of Parties, has even an arguable chance in England. 'Many men,' said Cromwell, 'have gone about to break Parliament, and in the end Parliament hath broken them.' Why? Because the public have become so used to talking of and counting on 'our Member' that they would feel lost and desolate if he were taken from them. He is Appeal Court, nurse and whipping-boy, even if he has ceased to be almoner.

THE GERMAN MADNESS

The absence of this personal touch and dependence in most other countries has been almost a determining factor in the destruction of their Parliaments. It is possible that M. Heriot was proud to represent Lyons, of which he had been Mayor, and that the citizens of Lyons took a pride in him. But what did the citizens of Paris know or think of the Socialist elected for the *X^m Arrondissement*? Bethnal Green knows its M.P.; but Bethnal Green is not a member.

France, however, having done its best for Parties with *Scrutin de liste* and second ballot, did settle down to the

representation of areas and not of Parties. But post-war Germany, obsessed by Party and mathematics, devised a system of Party Proportional Representation which guaranteed only the certain election of the Party 'bosses'. Nothing more calculated to destroy any contact between the people and Government ever came out of Bedlam. All representation was put into the hands of the co-opted Party caucus. The Thuringian Circle elected, say, fifteen Members to the Reichstag. Each of half a dozen parties drew up lists of fifteen candidates. The electors did not even know their names; they could not pick out their friends; they just voted for one or other of the half-dozen lists, the Party having already arranged the order of the names on the list. Mathematics then determined that the first five Socialists, four Nazis, three National Liberals, two Communists and one Democrat were elected to represent Thuringia. Thus the caucuses of the five lucky Parties decided *who* should go to the Reichstag. He might come from Silesia or Hamburg, but he represented Thuringia by the gift of his Party. As there were some ineffective votes, for Free Conservatives or *Centrum*, these were not wasted, but were added to other remnants elsewhere, and if the total exceeded some quota number, that Party got a special representative thrown in extra, representing nowhere in particular.

By-elections take place in England on a Member's death or retirement or promotion to the Lords. These elections are well reported and educate and guide public opinion as to the Government's activities. Also the candidates get to know something about politics and their people. Death or retirement of a Member caused no by-election in Germany (any more than they do in America). The Party to which the deceased belonged took the next man on their original list for that circle.

THE REICHSTAG DIED

Think what such elections mean! The candidates are no doubt known to the audience, though not their place-number on the list. They all speak to the same Party programme; they answer questions in the Party formula; no individual appeal is possible; one Party Address suffices for the whole country. The same people were re-elected every four years; no one could claim support as a 'Thuringian man for Thuringia'. It was just one Gallup Poll after another, a competition of platforms, not of men. And to get on the list one had to be just a useful man to the Party, not to the country—loyal to the Party boss, with no ties to any constituents who were not of the Party. When they all vanished in 1933, who cared?

During those fatal fourteen years, German Parties were as resolute as any religion, as full of hate as any bigot; they fought for conversion not comprehension. Germany was split from top to bottom, and every man knew to which faith he belonged. The various professional leaders faced each other like Generals in hostile armies, claiming a share of power based only on the voting strength of their army. In that sort of Thirty Years' War, reasoned argument and conscience played no part at all. In the Reichstag itself the men told off to speak by the Party stated the case of the Party for the Party, and after consultation in private with the Party. No one else could speak at all. Nor did the followers of one Party ever mix in public or in private with the fellows of the better Parties; any such action would have suggested treachery.

This is a terrible picture; and ever and again I see our own decent liberal-minded Labour Party being edged towards the same abyss in our own comfortable Parliament. For, truth to tell, leaders must always be tempted to secure dis-

cipline and their own convenience at the expense of the country. They, too, fear competition; they have a vested interest to protect. They closed the doors in Germany; they sealed the mouths; they counted votes. Then came one who counted not votes but guns. We, here, had better not go Party-mad like Germany. We had better realize before it is too late that Party loyalty shuts out better loyalty, is dangerous to democracy, and destroyed German freedom.

While the Weimar Republic was the worst case of Parties run mad, all the other European democracies which have now vanished moved more or less in the same direction. Leaders found they could control their followers and their electors more conveniently by Party discipline. They saw no danger in the increase of their own security. The Socialists of Vienna saw no danger in giving priority housing to members of the Party. The nearer the Fascist monster came, the more the sheep huddled together and the tighter they controlled their own, in order to avoid desertion and treachery. Round and round ran the sheep-dogs, while the wolf licked his chops. When he pounced, the victims were still thinking in numbers and sheltering under law and precedent. How should they know that in cultivating Party their Parliament had lost all roots in the land and among the people?

Wherefore I think Party solidarity, with the contempt and discontent it engenders, with the challenging invitation to Fascism to act on the same lines with greater thoroughness, with its suppression of individual freedom of debate, with its destruction of the link between the electors and the elected, with its emasculation of Parliament by discipline and the foreclosing of government by reason, to be the gravest and most dangerous enemy to democracy.

How then shall we view the prospective development of this evil in our own land, and what can be done to check the

danger? The hopeful features are the very recent emergence of the Party caucus, the prospect of many years of one-Party rule, the disasters to democracy which have resulted from the Party spirit, the innate British dislike of discipline and centralization.

The machine began to operate in 1885 after the grant of manhood suffrage; it was obviously the result of the large increase of the electorate in need of education and ripe for organization. The rise coincided with an acute political controversy and was swift and sure. In 1890 W. S. Caine, a good radical who had been liberal-unionist and regretted it, resigned his seat that he might be re-elected as an independent. He was popular and had everything in his favour, especially the honest determination to play fair with his constituency. He was defeated by the Party machine, and all similar cases have met the same fate, down to the Duchess of Atholl in 1939. I decided to refuse to resign in 1919 when I left the Liberal for the Labour Party, because I had stated in my election address that I held myself free to ally myself with any who might share my views. Till the very outbreak of war the Party machines were as resolute as ever, and there was hardly a Member for a popular constituency who could label himself as independent because he had not accepted the assistance of some Party machine.

A few University seats, where scholarship enjoys a special franchise, had, however, commenced to return at first one, and then more, independent Members. With the break-up of the Liberal fractions, further Members have declared themselves to be "independent", and such men actually stand a better chance of re-election under that title than if they called themselves 'Liberal'. The longer the present one-Party-rule continues and election contests between Coalitionists are prevented, the better opportunities will arise for the elec-

tion of independents.¹ Unfortunately, once elected, most 'independents' hasten to get under that Party 'umbrella' which will most effectively ensure their re-election. The perpetual preoccupation of every Member of Parliament is the retention of his seat in Parliament. I pretended to myself that I joined the Labour Party in 1919 in order to teach a more responsive crowd, both inside and outside the House, the immortal doctrines of Henry George; but I was always secretly aware that I wanted also to save my seat in the collapse of the Liberal Party.

THE I.L.P. AND PARTY RULES

I joined through the medium of the Independent Labour Party which was then an independent section of the Labour Party. That section could then nominate candidates for Parliament in precisely the same way as can still the Fabian Society of constructive socialists, and the Social Democratic Party of old-fashioned doctrinaires. Both these I disliked, as being anti-Liberal and essentially Conservative. For some years I was chairman of the then large group of I.L.P. in the House. Gradually, from 1923 onwards, the disciplinary Rules for the Labour Party in Parliament and in the various local Councils were invented and enforced in order to shackle or keep out the I.L.P. Members.

The war between the I.L.P. and the Trade Union section of the Labour Party was not of my doing; rather was it the result of the ambition of Mr. Wheatley, the Irish Catholic leader of the Party in Glasgow, who, with Maxton, entered Parliament in 1922. Wheatley saw that his best road to power was to inconvenience the Party. This he did by forcing divisions in the House on extreme issues, in order

¹ Since this was written six more seats have been won by independents from the established Parties!

to pillory his own colleagues in the Party as mere lukewarm 'gas and water' socialists. Within a year, Mr. MacDonald put him in his first Cabinet, actuated rather by fear than by love. But the same tactics were continued when We reverted to opposition in 1924.

The Party Rules were drafted to make impossible the inconvenient divisions in the House forced by this minority of extremists. Wheatley being dead, Maxton and the I.L.P. rump were expelled, and, to make the expulsion final, no man could ever again be adopted as a Labour candidate for Parliament until he had signed a document to say that he would obey the Party Rules in the House of Commons. This I declined to do; but the I.L.P., directly they were outside the Labour Party and had become a Glasgow family Party of five M.P.s, immediately adopted similar rigid Rules of discipline.

For many years, therefore, I have been an unaccepted but acceptable Member of the Labour Party in the House. I got the weekly whip as a convenience, if not as a right. My independence was tolerated as a tribute to the broadminded spirit of the Party; perhaps the Party leaders may now wish that they had treated Sir Stafford Cripps with the same liberality. Ever since 1929, expulsions and readmissions have constituted the undignified history of a Party which lives at present in greater fear of Communism than of Fascism.

This same struggle within the Party has been going on in every town council. Everywhere majority discipline hunts heretics. The I.L.P. has vanished except from Westminster and Glasgow, where it remains ignominiously in the pocket of the Catholic Church. But independents thrive wherever discipline is attempted, and Party leaders find rigid rules more embarrassing and absurd on the Stoke City Council than do similar leaders at Westminster. I do not believe

that rigid Party discipline can have an important future in England. Even Communism may adopt here something of our ineradicable toleration and Non-conformity; it is already a powerful critical agency.

By the end of the war (and the Party truce) no Party machine will have funds or efficient machinery. Moreover, there is sure to be a Communist Party to cut into the Labour vote, rendering Labour nomination less essential to securing a seat on the Left in Parliament. Any Liberal organization and candidate will find it wiser to adopt the style and title of 'independent', as did Vernon Bartlett with such success at Bridgwater. In the circumstances prevailing at the end of the war, one may hope that both Conservative and Labour organizations may find rebellion in their ranks and that many independent candidates may be supported just because they are against the caucus and adherents of no pledge-bound Party. The Communists will be stigmatized as pledge-bound and 'noddors' by their Labour opponents, inevitably loosening Labour's own bonds of discipline.

Already the apotheosis of the rebel Sir Stafford Cripps and the conversion of Bevin and Morrison from poacher to game-keeper have sensibly modified vision, faith and hero-worship in the ranks of Labour. In the Tory ranks a similar apotheosis of a greater rebel may work a like illumination. Fascism can hardly become popular here under its own name, but may assist in the downfall of Party, and the resurrection of that independence which was in the past the glory of the House of Commons.