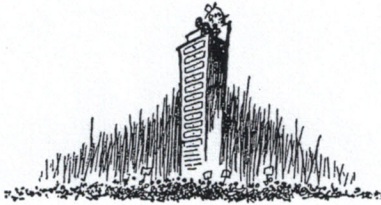


Cultivating the Bureaucratic Weed

A PROTAGONIST of the National Labor Relations Board said: This governmental agency is being attacked no more viciously than was the Interstate Commerce Commission during the Theodore Roosevelt administration. Like that and other bureaucracies which were opposed at their inception, the N. L. R. B. will weather the storm and be accepted. In time it will be found so useful that its abolition would be opposed by the very groups which now oppose its existence.

Quite true. And in this adjustment to bureaucracy lies the real threat to the hope for a good society. Whenever, in former times, a bureaucracy showed its head above the horizon, Americans instinctively would take pot shots at it. Even if we did not know how this hobgoblin came to be among us, or what mischief it might do, we felt that its presence was distinctly foreign to our traditional way of living.



Because we do not recognize the root cause of bureaucracies our pot shots are ineffectual. We attack only the effect. For instance, the vituperation against the N. L. R. B. has come mainly from those who would not lift a finger, or even a voice, against the low-wage economy which the N. L. R. B. hopes to at least mitigate. The bureaucrat-minded might say to these opponents: Well, if you don't like our way, what is your way of raising wages, abolishing poverty, stopping depressions? And there the opponents are stuck. They have only recrimination, no argument, in their arsenal, and can only cackle like a bunch of quarrelsome washerwomen.

That is why every bureaucracy weathers the initial storm of criticism. Then, since we are forced to accept its presence, we make our peace with it. It works because we make it work, our compliance becoming cooperation. It may be wrong in principle, costly and inefficacious, evil in its ultimate results; but, as soon as we are reconciled to its presence we become conditioned to its acceptance. In short order we find it beneficial, just as to savages the medicine man seems beneficial.

Every human institution, particularly a bureau-

cracy, builds around itself an armor of vested interests. The barnacle of all regulation is privilege. Administrators, clerks, private contractors who profit by orders for supplies, hangers-on to whom the crumbs of favor are a means of livelihood,—all these soon find further reason to adjust themselves to a bureaucracy, to espouse it, to proclaim its virtues.

In time each bureaucracy becomes another fixture in the status quo. Since no bureaucracy succeeds in solving the social problem for which it was invented, but succeeds only in keeping itself alive, new ones are formed to attack the same problem or to solve the problems which the bureaucracy itself has brought into being.

For instance, the New Deal agencies have not produced the social benefits they were supposed to produce; but they have become so arrogant in their behavior that even the President, their god-father, appointed a committee to look into the matter after he had vetoed the Walter-Logan bill aimed to reform the reform agencies.

Now this committee, headed by Dean Acheson, recommends the establishment of an Office of Federal Administration Procedure to keep an eye on the agencies. It made a thousand-page report, to be sure, but the important fact is the committee does not urge the abolition of any of the bureaucracies, but rather the creation of a super-bureaucracy. Nor does it tackle the question of whether these agencies have or have not succeeded in doing the social jobs for which they were created.

This new super-bureaucracy (it will be appointed, we may be sure) will meet with some opposition at first, but, like the others, it will soon find its nook in the status quo. Some day we will probably find it necessary to impose on it a super-super bureaucracy.

The end? See Rome. Or, if you don't like ancient history, see Germany.

The Freeman

A Monthly Critical Journal of Social and Economic Affairs

Published monthly by The Freeman Corporation, a non-profit corporation, at 30 East 29th Street, New York, N. Y. Officers and Directors: Lancaster M. Greene, Chairman; Anna George de Mille, President; Otto K. Dorn, Secretary-Treasurer; William H. Quasha, Counsel; Ezra Cohen, Francis Neilson, John C. Lincoln, Leonard T. Recker, Frank Chodorov. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of Congress of March 3, 1897. Single subscription, fifty cents a year; five or more, forty cents each. Title registered U. S. Patent Office.