# Chapter 16

# Adequacy Of Democracy

As shown in earlier chapters, the role which governments (whether "democratic" or totalitarian) and their associated bureaucracies play in the management of society has changed dramatically since the first modern states claiming to be democratic were established. This chapter will examine the adequacy of current forms of "democracy" in the modern world.

What is meant and understood by the word "democracy" varies markedly from place to place and from person to person. In some societies - such as those which proclaimed themselves to be "communist" or "socialist" - people may be able to participate in determining policies yet still have no effective way of removing leaders. In others, such as the UK, attention focuses on the ability to remove governments which incur public displeasure.

A moment's reflection reveals a major problem with the "able to remove leaders who have incurred public displeasure" standpoint. Bankers, industrialists, or trades unionists who do not like the policies being pursued by a particular government may set about creating intolerable conditions in such a way that the government, and not they, are blamed for them. It follows that the arrangements which are made to enable members of the public, who do not have access to financial resources, to build up and disseminate information to counter images crafted by the powerful are every bit as important as voting arrangements.

Popular understandings of "democracy" also involve the idea that the will of the majority is sovereign. While exceptions to this notion are recognised - in Western, but not Communist, "democracies" - it would not now be acceptable for a majority to impose religious beliefs and practices on minorities - the boundary between the areas in which a majority may compel a minority to think and do what it pleases and those in which this is unacceptable is not at all clear.

These observations suggest that we need to think more carefully about what we mean by "democracy".

Jaques[16.1] has highlighted the surprising fact that philosophers and psychologists have thought much less deeply about the organisational arrangements required when leaders are to be accountable to their followers than they have about the structures, expectations, and

practices appropriate when subordinates are to be accountable to those above them. Because the function of the latter is usually to achieve targets (such as making profits) which have already been established, he argues that they should be described as *Achievement Hierarchies*. The arrangements needed to establish goals and hold those charged with achieving them accountable for so-doing he designates as *Associations*.

In practice, the two interact. For example, at a societal level, two tasks which our societal management *Associations* should set our societal achievement hierarchies are (i) to find ways whereby social goals can be reached with the minimum of unpleasant work, and (ii) to create the maximum amount of satisfying activity for the members of society - recognising that this mainly means creating useful work.

The importance of the first of these tasks can hardly be exaggerated. Jaques has shown that most private and public-sector organisations are very badly organised from the point of view of carrying out work effectively. Most importantly, however, few members of either type of organisation think it is important even to think about the arrangements that are needed if they are to perform their functions effectively. One reason for this is that they think that natural selection in the marketplace will ensure that the organisations which survive carry out their work effectively. Unfortunately, as we have seen, this belief is not only ill-founded: The market actually has the opposite effect.

If, therefore, the public is to set its achievement hierarchies the task of ensuring that they carry out their work both effectively and in satisfying ways, the public will have to understand something of what we have seen of the functioning of the marketplace and why it behaves as it does.

In other words, the public cannot, as Douglas[16.2] and others would have us believe, use their *Associations* to set goals without understanding the issues involved. Furthermore, they cannot even obtain the information they need to understand the issues unless they set their bureaucrats the task of accumulating information the importance of which they do not recognise. Since the public cannot understand everything, this points to a need to re-examine the interface to be established between the public and the public service in fundamental ways.

Jaques has also exposed the way in which sloppy thinking about democracy has contaminated thinking about the design of employment hierarchies. One of the most potent sources of confusion is the concept of "democratic management".

It is necessary to say something more about this here because a clear understanding of the issues is central to what will later be said about the role of public servants and the arrangements which need to be made for their supervision.

The task of a manager is to consult widely, seek out relevant information, and then come to good discretionary judgments about what should be done, initiate action, monitor the results, and take corrective action. *It is primarily for performing this role effectively that he or she should be held accountable*. "Democratic", committee management virtually eliminates opportunities to perform this role. It thus eliminates any meaningful form of accountability.

*Control of Leaders*

One of the claims of proponents of Western democratic institutions is that they make it possible to remove incompetent or socially destructive leaders. Yet it is clear that the existence of formal, democratic, voting arrangements has enabled neither parliament nor populace to prevent such unscrupulous leaders as Hitler, Stalin, Hussein, Amin, or Marcos seizing power and thereafter changing the rules to secure their positions.

If we are to develop more effective ways of ensuring that public figures act in the public interest, we need to better understand how such figures - and any puppeteers who may stand behind them - gain and maintain their positions. In the paragraphs which follow we will explore this question from a number of different angles.

*Individualistic Power Strategies*

Guides to the strategies which can be, and have been, effectively pursued by individuals can be found in the works of Machiavelli (e.g. *The Prince*) and Hitler (*Mein Kampf*). Further insights are available in the works of McClelland[16.3].

McClelland's (and our own) work shows that people who are not primarily concerned with power (instead, valuing such things as advancing understanding or making people feel comfortable) find it almost impossible to believe that power-oriented individuals think and behave as they do. Indeed, many people refuse to recognise that numerous others *do* think and behave in these ways. They persist in believing in the public-spiritedness of human nature. They are therefore unwilling to spend time thinking about the arrangements which are required to control anti-social power-oriented individuals. They are shocked by exposures of behaviour motivated by values which differ so markedly from their own. But they think in terms of individual morality and condemn it at an *individual* level. They condemn individual colleagues, bosses, politicians, or national leaders. What is really needed is a *system* for capitalising on the strengths of certain types of power-oriented individuals and constraining others.

Hitler's *Mein Kampf* - in which his policy of blaming and persecuting the Jews is openly advocated as merely a strategy to unite the country behind him and in which his intentions to tell different lies to different subsections of the population to gain their support is made quite clear - does more than give us insight into Machiavellian strategies. The fact that it was required reading for all Germans tells us something very important about the inadequacy of widely proposed strategies for counteracting power-oriented and Machiavellian individuals. *Even when people know what their leaders are going to do, they either do not really believe it or are unable to organise to prevent it.* (This phenomenon has also been evident in Britain during the Thatcher years.)

The need is clearly to develop organisational arrangements - at the level of both non-governmental organisations and local, national and international government organisations - which do not assume and depend on the goodwill and social commitment of authority[16.4].

*Concerted Use of the Media, Mythology, Control of Information and Military Might*

Chomsky[16.5] has provided remarkable documentation of the inability of the institutions of Western democracy (including the press) to control power-oriented individuals and groups, whether they are to be found in governments or among those who lie behind them, and some insights into the way in which this control is achieved. Despite the appearance of ample

opportunities to dismiss unsatisfactory leaders and the free press, the destructive, even genocidal, tendencies of many of our leaders remain largely invisible .. and certain unstoppable. Chomsky argues that all American presidents would have been convicted by the Nuremberg Tribunal as a result of their contribution to genocidal activities, not only in Cambodia and Vietnam, but in East Timor, South America, and elsewhere in the Third World. For example, in East Timor 750,000 people have been massacred by the Indonesian government with the specific encouragement of, and with arms supplied by, the American government. In South America, the CIA and direct US military intervention first established corrupt and murderous dictators and then maintained them in power. In many other Third World countries the CIA and the American military directly supported barbarous regimes.

It is not clear to what extent these interventions were stimulated by the planned interventions of bankers and armament and other manufacturers or by governments' feeling that the social order of which it formed a part was under threat. There is no doubt that these activities did promote American prosperity by creating a market for armaments and bank lending (thereby creating work in America) and a flow of cheap agricultural products and commodities into the US. But, equally, there is no doubt that the interventions were largely legitimised by reference to real and fictitious antagonisms the countries concerned had towards the US, "democracy", or even capitalism as a system.

It is important here to underline that the formal, democratic institutions of the West failed to serve the American public every bit as badly as the "democratic" Party institutions of the Soviet Union failed to serve the Soviet public. That having been said, in our quest for a better understanding of the processes that are needed if we are to evolve societal management arrangements which function effectively in the public interest, it is of interest to compare both the record of the US and USSR and the methods they used.

Whereas Moscow actually poured money into its satellites - those in Warsaw always lived better than Muscovites - the US sucked money, materials, and labour out of other countries. Whereas dissidents and reformers in Czechoslovakia and Hungary were persecuted and imprisoned, in the countries of South America they were shot dead in the thousand ... with not only the knowledge, but at the specific behest, of US presidents. In the satellites of the United States, there was complete and effective control of free speech and elimination of opposition. In stark contrast to the USSR, the US government refused, and continues to refuse, to tolerate any foreign government which channels resources to its own poor. Chomsky has adduced strong evidence suggesting that this is because such actions reveal the failure of the governments in question to understand the US government's priorities. These are, as the East Europeans are now being forcefully taught, to keep the poor in their place and to promote the interests of the wealthy. And there is no doubt that, without overt and clandestine military intervention from the US, there would be many more democratically elected communist regimes[16.6].

Whereas the leaders of the Soviet Union sought to control their own population by brute force and restriction of information, control within the West has been achieved by more subtle means. These included, first, the creation of relative prosperity, busy-work, and the appearance of progress through the use of under-priced energy and cheap food and materials from the Third World. This supply was achieved by the application of military might and financial pressure *outside* the country. Secondly, it was achieved by deploying market mythology in appropriate ways. This is much harder to appreciate than the propaganda of a party machine run by known politicians and bureaucrats who can be seen to be acting in their

own interests. Third, subtle use was made of the media - especially television. This was used to trivialise, entertain, and create a climate of toleration of iniquity and inequity. People learned to tolerate, indeed laud, urban ugliness and squalor, police brutality, inhumane conditions of unemployment, vast inequities in wealth, ruthless personal ambition, political deception, and, perhaps more importantly, a climate in which people vie to make false claims and promises about their products, policies, and political objectives without expecting to be called to account. All of these are accepted as "normal" - as inevitabilities of nature and life - and have ceased to evoke moral outrage.

In short, the control of the flow of information - and the dissemination of mis-information and propaganda - has been much more subtle and effective in the West than in the USSR. There is, in the West, a well-trained press which, as a result of being embedded in a web of interlocking constraints stemming from owners, those who control the advertising on which the press is dependent, and the way in which that advertising functions to sell junk foods, junk toys (including cars), and simplistic misrepresentations of social reality which are designed reinforce the world-view of powerful and wealthy people, fails to seek out or publicise insights which would upset capitalist owners, advertisers, or consumers. Given the previously mentioned network of beliefs, the absence of investigative journalism, and the neutering of academic enquiry by a carefully cultivated authoritarian view of science and the linking of academic promotion to the generation of safe, non-controversial, trivial publications, it has been easy for the US governmental-military-industrial machinery to mislead, bypass, and flout the US Congress, other governments, and its citizenry.

As Chomsky[16.7] has emphasised, the military-industrial and banking complex, government, and the press are part of a single system. As a result, the most common responses to exposures of the inadequacies of formal democracy and the press - a shrug of the shoulders and a dismissive comment along the lines of "That is politics" or "The press should be more independent" - is entirely inadequate. Given their role in the system we have described, neither government nor the press could behave very differently. Given the apparent obviousness of this conclusion, what is surprising is how few people have considered its implications. We have been taken in by appearances, resorting to outraged moral expressions when particular instances of "failure" indicate that things are not as we believe they "should" be.

It emerges, then, that one of the most remarkable achievements of the Western capitalist system, *qua* system, has been to obscure the link between power, the Party, and *Pravda* that was so evident in Eastern Europe. Public pronouncements and beliefs are even more out of kilter with reality in the West than they were in the so-called Communist regimes - *yet even fewer people notice*.

It is clear from Chomsky's work that it is the way issues are framed and presented, what is put in - fabricated or not - and what is left out, and the implicit assumptions (e.g. that a country offers a breeding ground for ideas which threaten the American way of life - Capitalism) that are of fundamental importance in determining what happens. It is therefore on public surveillance of the processes which contribute to these kinds of activities - and not on formal voting mechanisms - that we need to focus if we are to evolve more effective forms of democracy.

To move forward, we need a more productive, independent, information-generation and dissemination system which is free to think the unthinkable, investigate the sacrosanct,

generate radical and heretical perspectives, collect evidence to substantiate such perspectives, mount the kind of heated controversial public debate on the basis of insecure evidence that is required to advance understanding, and disseminate the results without fear of reprisal. *Yet - despite widely held beliefs about the efficacy of "democracy" - we cannot expect our present governments to establish such a system.*

*The Use of Symbols and Imagery*

In seeking ways of controlling dominators - whether in public or private sector organisations, whether conspicuous or hidden - our main problem will not be to deal with "rational" arguments. This is because perhaps the most frightening component in the repertoire of those leaders who are able to secure widespread popular acclaim for their actions while in fact pursuing self-interested and otherwise destructive activities is their use of slogans, sound-bites, images, flags, and symbols to release emotions and evoke action. Unfortunately, the processes involved are poorly understood even - or perhaps particularly - by psychologists. They in fact merit thorough investigation and, most importantly, the invention of social arrangements through which they can be curbed.

The only suggestions we can currently make about how this is to be done follow very much along the lines which have already been suggested. We must somehow arrange for widespread public penetration of both the offices of governmental officials and leaders and those who run the other organisations of our society - as well as societies on the other side of the globe. These arrangements need to offer absolute security to those who become involved in them. Legal enshrinement of an inalienable right to opt out of government-decreed action - indeed to take direct action to undermine the activities of dominators - is also essential.

*Control of Public Perceptions and the Flow of Information*

It is perhaps not surprising that the US government has been able, as Chomsky has shown, to control public perceptions of international and economic issues. But governments' control of perceptions of apparently more domestic issues to achieve ulterior purposes is in a sense more disturbing. Examination of the Thatcher governments' activities in this area have much to teach us.

The use of the ideology of privatisation to control social research has already been discussed. The privatisation of research gives government tight control over the topics that are studied and the results that are reported. Institutes and academics who produce embarrassing findings are deprived of further funding on the pretext of inefficiency. Timescales are shortened and linked to urgent and pressing problems in such a way that the research cannot be other than trivial. Researchers are led to focus on securing their own bread and butter instead of furthering the interests of society. They are incited to attack each other's work instead of joining forces to promote either their joint interests or the public interest.

Similar mechanisms have been used to achieve control over the civil service.

Civil servants were first discredited in the eyes of the public. They were presented as lazy, inefficient, and feather-bedded - bent on pursuing their own interests instead of those of society. They were paid too much, had enviable conditions of service, and excessive pensions. They were a drain on the "real" producers of wealth. Bureaucratic regulation was killing the country. It was necessary to "roll back the frontiers of the state" and "destroy the

last vestiges of socialism". The Public Sector Borrowing Requirement had to be cut. The number of public servants had to be reduced and those who remained were to pursue the government's goals more wholeheartedly.

It is vital to note that the public largely swallowed this propaganda and thus accepted the terms of the debate. Even the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party found themselves talking about efficiency and accepting the "need" - ideologically rather than rationally based - to reduce the number of public servants, instead of about *assessing* effectiveness and finding ways of improving the quality of provision. It was *because* they accepted this image of the public service that the public neither appreciated the seriousness of the attack being made nor protested vigorously about what happened as a result.

Huge chunks of the public service were privatised and civil servants were dismissed. Those who remained were overloaded with supervising administrative re-organisations and the generation of glossy brochures making false claims for the effectiveness of the latest round of reforms. One re-organisation followed another without respite, and long before the previous one had been fully implemented. Priorities were continually changed and the staff moved around. Resources were cut and responsibilities multiplied. Increased public responsibilities without the resources needed to deliver the outcomes created still more opposition to public provision. Competition to acquire resources within the service increased. This not only took up still more time, it resulted in a marked decrease in the willingness of one department to cooperate with another. Tendering procedures were continuously changed. Public servants were forced to introduce changes which they knew to be ill-conceived, yet they were not allowed to say what they thought. The right to speak out in the public interest was quashed. Departments which had previously been relatively independent of government interference and thus able to speak against government in the public interest - such as the Government Social Survey Department, Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, the Government Research Laboratories, and the BBC - were brought under government control. It was proclaimed that the information available to the civil service was the property *of the government*, not the public who paid for it, and might not be released without specific government approval. Public servants were debarred from running for local government office. Political vetting for positions in the public service was introduced. The gentleman's agreement whereby public servants who supported the other main political party were quietly moved into back offices to generate alternative policies was terminated.

A similar attack was mounted on local government. It was made illegal for any Local Authority to use public funds to promote any view which was counter to government policy. The result is, in effect, that while people who know nothing can say what they like, no one who knows anything can tell. Worse, by restricting the views which can be aired *and supported by evidence*, the viewpoints which run counter to those of the government have been rendered even more suspect because only those who have no access to evidence are able to speak.

The Thatcher government also intervened both directly and indirectly in the BBC to prevent it making the kind of well-researched and well-informed programmes it had made in the past. In some cases, inquisitions (couched in terms of efficiency or bias) were instigated against programmes reporting information which ran counter to government policy. More often it was oblique attacks which were mounted. These questioned the cost-effectiveness of programmes, the size of the audience they attracted, or the "60's thinking" of their producers.

More generally in broadcasting there was a move not only to insist that all programmes must be both popular and cheap ... but also that they gain advertising. To do this, producers had to beware of offending those who sponsored the programmes and those who might buy the sponsor's products. They must promote sales by conveying a fraudulent image of the nature of modern society - the impression that cosmetics, cars, fashions, and junk foods buy happiness; the impression that the market provides choice; the impression that private companies care for the environment; the impression that private insurance companies care for the customer.

It is not known whether these attacks on the public service in general and the information services in particular were deliberately and systematically engineered or whether they just happened as the benefits became apparent of pursuing what was at first an ideological line. Likewise, it is not known whether the Thatcher government actually had *advice* on how to undermine the educational system and make it function in a way which would legitimise and reinforce societal changes which would secure the position of those who stood behind the government. What *is* known is that the government's attack on the trades unions *was* deliberately engineered. They were advised to take on the strongest union - the National Union of Mine-workers - by deliberately creating a situation in which the government could pick a battle which it was almost certain not to lose. The government was advised to - and did - agree, over a period of years, to almost anything the miners wanted. This policy was maintained until huge stockpiles of coal - sufficient to serve public needs for at least a year - had been accumulated. Only then should - and did - the government pick a quarrel with the Union - a quarrel which they chose on their own terms and in the context of a carefully prepared portrayal in the media. Availability of the stockpile of coal would ensure that there was little public opposition to a long strike. The government should stay in the background and make it look as if the argument was between the National Coal Board and the miners, but the activities of the police should be carefully coordinated, focussed on such things as flying pickets, and presented in a way which supported government. Thus, for example, TV news coverage was in one instance deliberately re-arranged so that a police charge on the miners appeared to follow, instead of - as in reality - preceding, miners stoning the police.

The way in which the Thatcher government got control of the terms of the debate and de-fused public opposition to its policies in education, health care, and the environment is equally interesting.

The carefully-chosen words, layout, and coloured print in consultation documents (if it did not make one suspicious) created the impression that the government really cared about the *quality* of the educational service, the environment or the health service. The documents asked readers to send suggestions to the civil service. However, since it was obvious that no radical change of heart could be expected, thousands of people were trapped into spending their time making "realistic and reasonable" suggestions for minor improvements which would, if implemented, ameliorate the worst effects of the proposals instead of thinking about the more fundamental issues which were involved. In this way the government captured the agenda. But since the time scales were inadequate, the civil servants available to analyse the comments too few, and, as Graham's remarkable book[16.8] shows, the government was entirely indifferent to the results, no effective change could emerge.

But perhaps the cleverest aspect of this strategy was that, by having comments and criticisms sent to the public service and, at the same time, making it clear that only the most trivial suggestions were likely to be implemented, the government not only diverted criticism from

itself, it also stifled public debate, and prevented the development of a coherent opposition. Had it not provided the bogus consultation exercises people might have written to the newspapers or otherwise developed an effective counter position.

And, of course, by making academic tenure depend on the publication of "research" and at the same time making the funding for that research depend to a much greater extent on the submission of proposals for applied research which related to the government's agenda, the government gained a much firmer hold on academics who might otherwise have been inclined to question their agenda. Even debate within professional associations had to focus on issues which it was "realistic and reasonable" to discuss in the climate which had been created.

Once again, we do not know how much of this was deliberately planned and how much evolved through successful experience. The Thatcher government did not rest content with controlling the generation and flow of information. It introduced legislation curtailing civil rights, enabling the police to arrest and search homes more or less at will, legitimising the investigation of communications, and generally giving the government the right to assume more powers than any government before it. Once again, it introduced these developments by stealth, often tabling the legislation on quite other pretexts.

The UK legislation introduced during the 1980s represents a previously inconceivable blow to the most fundamental claims of democracy - the right to freedom of thought, speech, and association. But Parliament did not - indeed could not - resist it. Because of the way the issues were presented, the "consultation" process, and the government's control of the media, there was little public resistance and no *concerted* protest. By and large, people had little idea of what was going on and no idea of the seriousness or pervasiveness of the attack. Further, most of those who did realise the gravity of the situation accepted that a "democratically" elected government - albeit a government elected by a minority of the population - had been given the right to do whatever it wished. It would be wrong to take direct action to counteract it: That would undermine the whole democratic framework. One should wait for the next election and hope to undo the damage.

The examples used so far in this section - all from the UK - illustrate that the way in which issues are framed and presented controls the debate and results in policies which can confer benefits or impose burdens on apparently untargeted sectors of the population.

Giroux[16.9] has provided an illuminating account of the way in which the American government framed educational issues to exclude discussion of crucially important topics - such as the need to break the cycle of poverty and tackle low achievement stemming from homelessness, and the way in which the educational system is locked into the production of rampant individualism. In the public debate there was - as in Britain - no discussion of the need for the educational system to nurture high-level competencies and especially the qualities required to transform society. As a result, the so-called "debates" about testing and choice failed to engage with the main goals of education or with the main factors (such as coping with poverty) which determine performance - even when this is narrowly defined. The assumption that these are external to the educational system makes them invisible and thus facilitates their neglect in policies that are supposedly designed to remedy the problems of the educational system. The debate fails to engage with the need to offer multiple courses to nurture multiple talents instead of arranging everyone on a single-scale of "ability". By hijacking the terms of debate and structuring issues in particular ways it has been possible to

preclude discussion of other issues. These include the norm-referenced nature of the system and the way this results in large numbers of "failures", whatever is done. They include discussion of the role of schools in society, what really makes for success as currently defined, and what might make for alternative forms of success. They include discussion of the educational system as a system and as part of a wider system - and hence of the need to intervene in that system of systems, by, for example, finding ways of recognising and utilising all the talents available in society.

But most important of all, the way the debate was structured undermined belief in the responsibility of public servants and teachers - who were, as in Britain, presented as incompetent and irresponsible and, as a result, needing to be given much more specific directives and subject to more rigorous inspections. Their role was also, as in Britain, presented as involving no responsibility for wider social intervention - such as finding ways of tackling the real problems of the educational system or enabling it to nurture the qualities students require to tackle the real problems of society.

Although Giroux does not say so explicitly, what emerges is a picture of an entirely fraudulent debate. The real issues have to do with the sociological - not the educational - functions of the educational system. The covert, or latent, as distinct from the manifest, goals of the changes which were introduced have to do with narrowing the criteria of "excellence" applied in education. They have to do with enlisting the support of parents to press for "developments" which will ensure their children's success in terms of that criterion alone, and thus eliminating an emphasis on the development of thinking skills, the ability to understand or influence society, or multiple talents. They have to do with cementing the belief that the "best" rise to the top and thus faith in the social order. They have to do with strengthening the incentives for pupils and parents to act in their own short-term interest rather than in their longer-term interests, the interests of others, or the interests of society. They have to do with strengthening the tendency of the educational system to ensure that those who rise to the top are the most gullible, most concerned with their own advancement, and most willing to echo received opinion. They have to do with creating a steeper differential of rewards between those who trouble themselves to do well in a fraudulent system and those who do not. They have to do with finding ways of transferring the blame for school failure from the politicians and public servants responsible for the *system* to those with least power to introduce systems changes - i.e. pupils and their teachers.

To have a genuine debate about these issues or the genuinely educational functions of the educational system it would be necessary to create a structure which would make it possible to get the wider issues on the agenda. To do this it would be necessary to back people who persist in being "unrealistic" and "unreasonable" and get them into positions in which they can both be heard and conduct the research needed to support their positions.

While, as we have seen in the previous chapter, there are very strong pressures to be make only recommendations which are likely to be accepted because they "work with the system" ... to do what one can within the existing arrangements ... to do so is, in fact, highly unethical. It allows those who control the terms of the so-called "debate" to manipulate what gets discussed in ways which are very much to their advantage and it helps to keep invisible the very things that are most important and which in fact require the *greatest* discussion and research.

Such apparently marginal issues as the practical arrangements for resourcing, researching, and publicising unacceptable points of view thus turn out to be central to the development of a more functional concept of democracy.

*Control of Public and Private Institutions*

*The Public Sector*

The institutions of democracy are meant to enable us to subordinate our public service, our manufacturers, and the other institutions of our society to the public interest. The extent to which they have enabled us to do these things will now be examined.

As we have seen, the ability of elected Assemblies to direct and oversee the work of the public service, whether at a national or local level, has been greatly eroded as the role of government in society has expanded and the issues have grown in complexity. Members of neither parliaments and councils on the one hand, nor government or council office bearers on the other, can be well informed about all of the huge range of issues over which they have dominion. This results in government by people who have little direct interest in, little experience of, and little in-depth knowledge of the problems they are tackling - still less a full understanding of the implications of the decisions they are taking.

Decentralisation to multi-purpose assemblies in no way resolves this problem. Nor does the creation of QUANGOS (whose members tend to be appointed rather than elected, and who tend to be peripatetic public servants). This is because the members of both tend to have little contact with, or deep understanding of, the issues with which they are dealing.

Day and Klein[16.10] have contributed an important study which helps to advance understanding and indicate a way forward. They record that the belief that the main function of representative governmental assemblies is to compel a full justification of all government acts and to make apparent to all who did everything (so that those concerned can, if necessary, be dismissed) goes back through Mill to Aristotle.

Mill argued that:
> "Instead of the function of governing, for which it is radically unfit, the proper office of a representative assembly is to watch and control the government; to throw the light of publicity on its acts; to compel a full exposition and justification of all of them which any one considers questionable; to censure them if found condemnable, and if the men who compose the government abuse their trust, or fulfil it in a manner which conflicts with the deliberate sense of the nation, to expel them from office".

As we saw in the last chapter (where the reasons for it were discussed), modern democracies fall far short of this ideal.

*The Private Sector*

Further evidence of the inability of our existing democratic institutions to manage the institutions of modern society in the public interest comes from the work of Janicke[16.11], who showed that, throughout its entire existence, the government of the Federal Republic of Germany was unable to control its TNCs. Instead, in instance after instance, the latter manipulated laws passed ostensibly in the public interest to suit their own ends.

George[16.12] has documented many of the strategies the TNCs use to do this. They threaten to move, and actually do move, employment to other countries, they evade national taxes and welfare and safety regulations, they manipulate prices, and they engineer the introduction of non-tariff barriers to constrain the operations of potential competitors. An example of the latter is European chocolate. The TNCs lobbied for a high tax on imported manufactured chocolate, they lobbied for the setting of "standards" for the purity and ingredients of chocolate, and they restricted the supply of patented machinery available to non EC countries. In this way they forced non-member countries to supply only raw materials.

Etzioni[16.13] cites many studies, from several countries, reporting results similar to Janicke's. Governments are outwitted by companies aware that political manipulation is essential to build and maintain monopolies and oligopolies, to capture and hold market shares, and to curb the entry of new firms. Their interests are also promoted by manipulating economic conditions and public opinion - the latter being achieved by controlling the flow of information and promoting simplistic economic notions. Galbraith[16.14] likewise noted that the military-industrial complex controls the democratic system which is supposed to control it.

We have already seen that Douglas[16.15], Roberts[16.16], Adelmann[16.17], Daehnhardt[16.18], and Sorensen[16.19] have documented the international banking community's conspiracies to manipulate governments; their deliberate use of their power to precipitate panics and cycles of boom and bust to influence government action; their systematic intervention in educational systems nominally under the control of national or local governments; their deliberate use of financial intervention in the affairs of nominally independent companies to achieve their own ends; and their deliberate precipitation of armed conflict, both within and between countries, to their own advantage.

Korten[16.20], relying on *The Greenpeace Guide to Anti-environmental Organisations*, identifies 36 front organisations created by corporations to deceive public and government alike. Thus *Consumer Alert* actually fights government regulation of product safety. *Keep America Beautiful*, has as its objective to convince the public that litter is the responsibility of consumers and not the packaging industry and campaigns against recycling legislation. He also identifies the corporate sponsors behind think-tanks like the Heritage Foundation and the Institute for Educational Affairs. Every one of the members of USA/NAFTA, which claims to be a representative forum to promote free-trade, represents a corporation. While assuring Americans of the benefits of free trade the corporations concerned had moved 180,000 jobs to Mexico. In the US alone, 170,000 public relations employees - in comparison with 40,000 news reporters, are engaged in manipulating news, public opinion, and public policy. The Council on Foreign Relations was set up, and still operates, to assure US manufacturers of a "Grand Area" of the globe from which they can suck in agricultural products and raw materials and to whom they can export goods and services.

It would appear from the various studies we have reviewed that the most vociferous proponents of democracy are not genuinely interested in openness, but in creating a facade which will conceal the activities of the banks, the TNCs, and the doings of the public service. The arrangements which have resulted seem to have been developed - perhaps explicitly - to conceal rather than disseminate information, to present it in particular ways, to control information flows, and to prevent people collecting and publicising information about the behaviours of both governments and the TNCs.

The problems we now face were anticipated, and set in their historical and social context by the Scottish social and moral philosopher, John MacMurray[16.21], in 1943. He first noted that the structures and concepts of democracy with which we are currently operating were introduced to deny governments the right to determine the thoughts, beliefs, and consciences of their subjects - or to limit their rights of association. The specific reason for introducing these constraints was the desire to prevent governments from seeking to determine religious beliefs and practices and from limiting their subject's rights of association in this respect. We therefore find that establishing religious freedom - which lies at the heart of democracy - also establishes the principle of the limitation of political authority. The right to religious freedom asserts the general principle that there are departments of social life in which it is not legitimate for political authority to intervene: people who have different values and priorities should be permitted to lead their lives in their own way. Democratic governments, no matter how large their majorities, have no right to impose values and thoughtways on minorities.

However, MacMurray argued, problems began to arise as soon as this principle was extended to the economic sphere. The philosophy that government had no right to limit the behaviour of one group for the benefit of another was extended to assert that government had no right to intervene in economic processes. This had two consequences: First, governments were perceived as having no role in orchestrating the use of the resources of a community for the benefit of that community. They could thus have no rights to own or control resources. Their task was to maintain people's freedom of choice and action. Somewhat paradoxically, this meant that democracy had no way of controlling the economic activity of a community in such a way as to promote poorer people's opportunity to exercise the very freedom of thought and action democracy was established to make possible. Second, it resulted in the concentration of the ownership and control of resources in the hands of fewer and fewer people - who then used their economic power to control the thoughts and behaviour of others - including governments and such institutions as churches and universities. It thus resulted in the control of culture - which was explicitly denied to political authority - being exercised by economic powers which were - and are - themselves exempt from political control.

MacMurray sought to specify the steps needed to introduce what he called the positive, or *constructive*, democracy required to overcome these difficulties. He recognised the danger that if governments were given the right to control the use of resources they might - almost certainly would - exercise even more control over people's thoughts and behaviour than the capitalist class. There would be no way of stopping them because it would now be impossible for parliament to deny government the resources needed to enact undesirable policies. But if governments themselves did not directly control the ownership and use of resources, they would find that it was virtually impossible to pursue policies which were contrary to the wishes of dominant economic groups. The two would tend to become indistinguishable. How could this dilemma be resolved? How were the people to control their governments if they could no longer deny them the resources they needed to pursue irresponsible policies whether of their own or capitalists' making?

MacMurray also raised the question of how government could be supervised and controlled if it arrogated to itself responsibility for orchestrating the use of the resources of a community for the good of that community. Government control of activities like education, social work, and health care seriously courts the danger that governments will impose beliefs, values, behaviours, and rights of association on their subjects. In modern societies (in which, as we

have seen, governments play a major role), the assumption by government of responsibility for such activities tends inevitably toward government by ignoramuses. Worse, given the widespread assumption that the will of the majority is sovereign, it tends to result in the imposition of the will of an *uninformed* majority on those who have a particular interest in the issues in question, that is to say on minorities who have different problems and priorities to the majority.

MacMurray's answers to these questions were, first, to develop an active citizenry who would examine, protest, and play an active, participative, role in running society; and, second, to recruit and train public servants who would have the strongest possible commitment to promoting the public interest and a strong tendency to resist other pressures, whether these arose directly from government or from economically dominant groups. Unfortunately, he did not focus on *the social context* which is required to reinforce such behaviours.

In the light of MacMurray's observations, it is ironic that the management of the economy should now be the *main* thing for which governments are held accountable despite the widely held, but contradictory, belief that the economy should be left to work on its own.

### *Majority Voting*

At this point we may return to the problems which stem from the fact that "democracy" is most commonly understood as involving little more than voting and the associated idea that a majority vote is binding on all. The view is rampant despite MacMurray's demonstration that what was at issue when democracies were established was precisely the right of minorities to act as their consciences directed.

Miller[16.22], citing Arrow[16.23] and a number of examples as clear as Hardin's *Commons Dilemma*, shows that, where there are a variety of interested parties whose demands are mutually incompatible, and where what one group gets influences what others can get, the series of coalitions and compromises which have to be formed as sub-groups conspire to coalesce to yield a majority block vote leads to outcomes which suit no one group and typically to decisions which no rational person - and none of the individual participants - would support. Furthermore, very different decisions emerge depending on the *order* in which the motions are debated and voted upon so that whoever determines the agenda largely determines the outcome. Since issues can be re-opened with a different agenda which will lead to a different outcome, "the instability of majority rule makes it unacceptable as a mode of decision-taking in most organisations".

Three vital questions do not appear to have been carefully addressed in the extensive literature on this subject. These concern:
  i. Who should be *entitled* to vote when issues are being decided by referenda (e.g. everybody; only those directly affected; all who will be affected in the long run; only the informed)?
  ii. Under what conditions is it legitimate to seek to make a majority decision which is binding on all (e.g. only when it is impossible for different groups to go their own way, only when a minority will damage the welfare of the majority)?
  iii. How can marginal groups be helped to get their opinions researched and presented in a way which commands respect?

Toffler[16.24] has emphasised the value of using the media to create an informed public debate and of using Internet and similar technologies which allow people to register their opinions from their living rooms, to provide feedback from a broadly based and informed constituency. Unfortunately Toffler does not discuss some of the most important issues. For example, he does not discuss how the presentation of issues is to be determined, how the range of options to be considered is to be chosen, how experimentation with possible new options is to be initiated and monitored, or how it is to be decided to collect which information on which benefits, short and long-term, personal and social, for which groups of the population are to be considered. People cannot vote for things they do not know are feasible and practical. For example, at the most fundamental level, given the current state of politico-economic philosophy (let alone of extant, documented systems), there is at present no alternative to capitalism which can be presented as a realistic alternative that people can vote *for* in their efforts to translate their desire for an alternative economic and social order into effect. They cannot vote for experiments unless they know that it is *possible* to do things differently or to collect information that they did not know it was *possible* to collect. Nor does Toffler discuss the arrangements needed to conduct social surveys which will yield information which is more useful than the typical *Gallup Poll*. Who is to determine the questions that are asked, the assumptions they make, and thus what the public's opinions appear to be? How best can those with unusual views make their views known, generate relevant questions, collect data, and contribute to the ensuing debate?

It is obvious from this discussion that, while general public debate and understanding of the issues is often very important, it is no more possible to have a public which knows everything about everything than it is to have a government which does so. The processes we have been describing are anything but simple but here it is sufficient to note that the way in which time and resources are to be allocated for these things needs the most careful consideration. On the whole, the audiences will be small and widely dispersed, but the presentation needs to be both engaging and responsible. The link to previously discussed responsibilities of the public service could not therefore be more apparent. Far from pointing to Toffler's image of mass participation, these reflections again suggest that the key problem is to find ways of holding public servants accountable for collecting and sifting information and acting in the public interest.

The range and complexity of the issues to be discussed and the lack of significant thought about voting explains the public's apparent "apathy" about elections - an apathy which is often interpreted as a lack of enthusiasm for "democracy". A single omnibus vote every five years provides very little feedback to government and does not enable one to have much influence on the decisions of most concern, particularly as one may wish to vote in favour of one party's policies in connection with 50 issues and for another's in connection with the other 50. What is more, there is no point in voting at all if one is anyway going to have one's priorities over-ruled by the tyranny of the majority. In such conditions, one can have very little influence. One cannot even influence the choices and options the bureaucracy provides. And, of course, one can do very little to influence the powers and systems processes which, as we have seen, so much control what governments do. Given an opportunity to exert genuine *influence*, however, it would not be unreasonable to anticipate a much greater readiness to "participate".

At this point we may note the flimsiness of the case for Regional Assemblies as a means of tackling the "unresponsiveness" of central government and reversing policies which do not take account of local needs and priorities. There is no way in which *any* multi-purpose

assembly can today represent the scope of opinions which need to be considered on the wide range of issues to be dealt with.

In fact, there *is* no evidence that the quality of Local Authority decision-taking is any better than the quality of that of central government, that their decisions are better thought-through and evaluated, that their actions are more effective, that local elected representatives have more awareness of the doings of, or control over, their public servants, or that they are more responsive to people with a wide range of different priorities. Local Assemblies are no better supplied with research information, they have fewer "think tanks", they have fewer links with outside organisations which control the quality of life in their communities, and their members are equally prone to rush from meeting to meeting to take decisions about issues they know nothing about and within constraints they are forced to accept because they come from outside the community. Indeed, they are more likely to be doing what they know to be wrong because they are unable to influence those external constraints.

We may note that the election of "representatives" does *not* lead to the election of a range of people who represent the spectrum of public opinion because only certain types of people put themselves forward and are thought to possess appropriate characteristics. If one *really* wants to ensure that the views of all groups are represented in a discussion (and any subsequent decision taking process) one must choose those representatives at random[16.25].

The way to deal with the difficulties raised in this section is for democracy - structures of participation - to focus on *supervising a public service charged with handling the problems* in a differentiated and innovative way. In Jaques' terms, it is to restore managerial responsibility in the context of appropriate supervisory arrangements.

*Supervision of "Devolved" Public Services*

In theory, our "democratic" structures are meant to provide us with means of monitoring and improving the way we run our society *as a whole*. In what is presented as an attempt to achieve this objective more effectively (but which, on closer examination, turns out to be quite the opposite), numerous QUANGOS have been established in recent years - most notably to give a semblance of public accountability in newly privatised sectors of the public service. In a sense, what we need to do now is to make these QUANGOs more open, accountable, and effective and to equip them with the tools that are needed to do their jobs properly, and, especially, to initiate the further activities which are required to promote systems monitoring and systems innovation.

The legal system may be used to highlight the nature of the need. Its *raison d'etre* is to administer laws generated by the state. Yet the effectiveness of those laws from the point of view of achieving their original objectives is often inadequate. As the work of the National Council for Civil Liberties (now Liberty) has shown over the years, miscarriages of justice abound. Parris[16.26] brings together an interesting collection of them. His conclusion is that it is fruitless to rely either on our current forms of democracy or on our legal system. It is more important to have widespread public scepticism and - a remarkable conclusion for a judge - a willingness to take the law into one's own hands. He also argues that it is vitally important to have a responsible press - although he does not discuss how this can be achieved without independence or how, given the need for funding from government or advertising, independence can be achieved. It emerges that the price of liberty is, indeed, eternal vigilance.

But while, time and again, we find that those who have thought deeply about these issues - like Chomsky and Parris - have come to the conclusion that personal integrity and action lie at the heart of the requisite developments, one cannot help feeling that, given the scale of public management, of our environmental problems, and of organised crime and fraud, an emphasis on personal responsibility, integrity, and action on its own is inadequate. We need some more formal arrangements to encourage participation in the management of society and to enable resources to be devoted to the investigation of scandal and the invention of better ways of thinking about and doing things.

"Participative democracy" should perhaps build on the work of Schon[16.27], Kanter[16.28], and Revans[16.29]. Schon has outlined the kind of "networking" arrangements which are required for innovation, Kanter the "parallel organisation" arrangements which are required to enable all concerned to participate in innovation, and Revans has experimented with "action learning".

*Notes*

16.1  Jaques, 1976

16.2  Douglas, 1934

16.3  McCelland et al., 1958; Winter and McClelland, 1963; Winter, 1973; McClelland, 1975

16.4  The Noberto Keppe Foundation, recognising the centrality of this problem, has carried out some extremely important experimentation with alternative management arrangements in small, and not so small, organisations and promoted Forums to clarify the alternative organisational arrangements required at national and international levels. They also produce Newsletters with a view to promoting more widespread recognition of the behaviour of some business and political leaders and encouraging people to act on their consciences in relation to a wide range of political and social issues.

16.5  Chomsky, 1991

16.6  Although we have now seen endless problems with democracy, it may still be argued that Western "democratic" institutions are the best of the available options. Actually this is not the case. Delight at the demise of "communism" is unwarranted for two reasons:

a) It takes no account of the reigns of terror, death, extermination, suppression of free speech, denial of human rights, exploitation of resources, and poverty and disease which Western capitalist states forced on their network of satellites - which is far larger than that of the USSR. These satellites were subject not only to "economic" pressure (e.g. through the IMF and the World Bank) but, as Chomsky (1987, 1991) has shown, to military force directly and openly applied with the aid of propaganda and deception (as in Vietnam and the Persian Gulf), directly but clandestinely inflicted (as in Cambodia), directly orchestrated but inflicted through puppet regimes in the countries concerned (as in Nicaragua, Grenada, and Honduras) and directly inflicted through adjacent local governments (as in East Timor). The regimes of Eastern Europe were, at least in the post-Stalin era, a great deal more humanistic than those of the West. They imprisoned dissidents instead of shooting them - and then, utterly remarkable from a Western perspective, *gave them back their jobs* when they were released as the regime changed. Thus, while the deadliness and destructiveness of Stalin's regime can hardly be over-estimated, there is little doubt that the post-Stalinist regimes were, *taken as a whole*, a great deal *less* destructive of human life than the Western capitalist system.

b) The poor people who formed part of that system were a great deal better off than the poor in America - never mind the poor in the beleaguered countries which form part of the Western capitalist system. Environmental destruction there was too ... but it was "at home" and not on the other side of the globe and it was more visible and less carefully concealed with less attention being directed toward what are, in comparison with fuel emissions, social disintegration, etc. more peripheral issues like cigarette smoking.

16.7  Chomsky (1989, 1991) has shown how the combined forces of "democratic" government and a "free" investigative press failed to compel exposure of crimes and conspiracies against humanity by the US governmental/military/industrial complex. He has also provided detailed accounts of the way in which they failed to prevent the media promoting the correct political line, without examination, to support the wars in Vietnam and the Persian Gulf. They failed to prevent the media from accepting and promoting myths, indeed actually working up hysteria, which helped to destroy democratically elected governments which were inclined to act in the interest of their general population instead of capitalists - and which could therefore be portrayed as leaning toward communism and thus automatically a "threat to America". They

proved unable to prevent the media encouraging such feelings of despair and impotence on the one hand, and belief that only government action could solve the problems facing the globe on the other, that people do not even try to do anything about serious problems.

He has shown that abuses of civil rights and campaigns of death and oppression in other countries were systematically engineered by US governments, and supported to promote arms sales and the subsequent flow of below-cost minerals and agricultural products. Opression was ignored altogether if it posed no threat to, or intervention posed no advantage to, the United States.

16.8  Graham and Tyler, 1993

16.9  Giroux, 1992

16.10 Day and Klein, 1987

16.11 Janicke, 1990

16.12 George, 1988

16.13 Etzioni, 1985

16.14 Galbraith, 1991

16.15 Douglas, 1935/78a

16.16 Roberts, A.E., 1984

16.17 Adelmann, 1989

16.18 Daehnhardt, 1994

16.19 Sorensen, 1994

16.20 Korten, 1995

16.21 MacMurray, 1943

16.22 Miller, 1992

16.23 Arrow, 1963

16.24 Toffler, 1980

16.25 See e.g. Goldsmith (1992) and Emery (1974). Emery has laid particular stress on the use of sortition - choosing representatives at random as distinct from through election. Elections inevitably result in the election of people who have very different concerns and priorities from those who elect them. Inevitably they are more power hungry people, who are adept at manipulating human systems and who act in socially dysfunctional ways when they gain positions of power. Sortition offers a better way of obtaining decisions which reflect the concerns of the general population.

16.26 Parris, 1961

16.27 Schon, 1973

16.28 Kanter, 1985

16.29 Revans, 1971, 1980