# ON THE "GOVERNABILITY" OF DEMOCRACIES


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These are times when we are forcefully reminded of the basic functions of government — law and order, and external defence. These are by the same token bad times for liberty. Liberty flourishes when reforms of the criminal justice system and reductions in defence expenditure are possible without any threat to people's safety at home and security abroad. Safety and security are never a sufficient condition of liberty; but they are a necessary condition. And today there is a smell of war in the air.

Chancellor Schmidt of West Germany tells us that 1980 is one long July 1914. We remember: when Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated at Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, everyone commiserated with the Austrian Emperor (never mind the unpopularity of the Archduke), and most gave the Austrian Government to understand that they would tolerate certain reprisals against Serbia. A month, endless diplomatic contacts, and quiet military preparations later, the world had changed out of recognition. One word, above all, was heard in the capitals of Europe, the word "inevitability": war, it was said, was now "inevitable"; and so it began. In his recent article in *Foreign Affairs,* Professor Miles Kahler has taken the analogy further.[1] He sees Russia today in the position of Germany in 1914, the United States in the position of Britain, the Middle East as the Balkans of 1980, and above all once again the unwilling slide into inevitability everywhere.

There is, however, at last one major difference. It may be that once again there are those who believe that war can be "localised". One might even argue that John Hackett in his book on the *Third World War* has done us a disservice by suggesting that once Birmingham and Minsk have been wiped out by nuclear devices, all will be over, so that those of us who are lucky enough not to live in these doomed cities will be all right (provided, of course, we let NATO arm to the hilt).[2] In fact, the doctrine of limited war in the nuclear age is infinitely more dangerous than the equally mistaken doctrine of localised war was in 1914. The fact is that today mankind can destroy itself, or rather, can be destroyed by the decisions of a small number of governments. Never has there been as dramatic a mismatch between the potential of destruction and the frailty of men, including those who command the potential. Neither red telephones nor double-check command systems nor the fantasy of a monastic order of moral physicists who guard the dangerous material

can bridge the mismatch. The fact is — to quote one of those responsible for these dangers, though one who has since given much thought to coping with them, the physicist-philosopher Carl Friedrich von Weizsacker — that "the Third World War is probable", because nothing was changed in the hegemonial contest which leads to war; indeed " the Third World War will take place once it can be won".[3]

This is a gloomy beginning. It might even be called somewhat melodramatic, were it not for the fact that either the hegemonial contest, or the proliferation of nuclear weapons to nations threatened for survival, or a mere accident might well lead to widespread destruction. And if it is true that it is unlikely that there is any government which can be counted on to control the ultimate threat, then this presents clearly also the ultimate problem of governability: it appears that we have created technical possibilities of destruction which no conceivable human government can contain. We have reached limits of governability. I shall return to this point at the end of my lecture. For the moment, let me take refuge in a statement by the philosopher of desperate optimism, Karl Jaspers, in his book on *The Atom Bomb and the Future of Man:* "Reason tells us: it shows little courage to make statements on the end and the inevitable downfall. It shows courage to do what is possible, given our knowledge and our ignorance, and not to abandon hope as long as one lives".[4] Let us leave the dark cloud of war in the distant, or even not-so-distant sky then and turn to areas of life which are more obviously within the orbit of government action, or would seem to be so. Inflation is a topical and important example. One of the many things which seem to have gone wrong with the economics of OECD countries in the 1970s, is the apparent inability to contain inflation. Several recipes have been tried. First, there was the stimulation of growth, in order to catch up with inflation, as it were; but for a variety of reasons, growth itself has become more difficult and never did catch up, quite apart from the fact that it is doubtful whether it contains or generates inflation. Then, there were tricks designed to cushion the effects of inflation, and perhaps to expose its absurdity, such as indexation; but examples like Israel show that while this may expose the absurdity, it does not remove it. Then, there was the "social contract", an agreement to hold down expectations on the wages front, and sometimes on that of prices as well; but whether "contract", "policy" or even "law", it does not seem to work for any length of time. Finally, there is the control of the money supply (whatever that is), by high interest rates, cuts in public expenditure, growing unemployment, and the like; but the more technical the policy is, the less does it come to grips with the real problem of people's expectations. Those who have tried a mix of the various policies have been most successful; though even their success is limited, and may have been achieved for different reasons, a strong industrial base, favourable terms of trade, and other comparative advantages. Thus, inflation, one of the banes of the OECD world, seems to have escaped the ability of governments to cope. It is clearly a test of governability.

## The Schizophrenia between Personal and Political Well-Being

James Alt has recently looked at what might be called the subjective side of the story, people's perceptions (in Britain since 1964), in his book, *The Politics of Economic Decline*.[5] His findings are a goldmine for analysis. For instance, he can show that people's inflationary expectations exaggerate existing trends considerably, thus making the monetarist remedy even less effective.[6] He also shows that wage controls are the most popular remedy,[7] though he does not tell us whether people want to see the wages of others controlled, or their own. But in our context, another of his findings is the most important. For a long time, Alt tells us (in line with Butler and Stoke, and others),[8] people have distinguished quite clearly between their personal well-being and that of their country. And with curious schizophrenia, they did not associate their personal well-being with politics, but took it for granted that by and large they have never had it so good. On the well-being of the country, on the other hand, views varied, and changed, and these changes and variations determined the electoral success of the parties. Then comes inflation; and suddenly personal and national well-being merge. Not only the country, but people themselves are doing badly if inflation rates run into two figures. So naturally, people expect government to do something about it. However, governments, successive governments of different parties, fail. "In 1970", James Alt reports, "nearly 60 per cent felt that 'a government can do a lot to check rising prices'. In early 1974, only a quarter of the electorate felt that way".[9] Alt's conclusions may be far reaching, but they are not implausible: people have ceased to expect government to deliver the goods:

> "In large measure, then, the story of the mid 1970s is the story of a politics of declining expectations. People attached a great deal of importance to economic problems, people saw clearly the developments that were taking place, and people expected developments in advance and thus were able to discount the impact of the worst of them. However, in unprecedented numbers, people also ceased to expect the election of their party to make them better off, largely because they also ceased to expect it to be able to do very much about what they identified as the principal economic problems of the time. The result of this . . . was not a politics of protest, but a politics of quiet disillusion, a politics in which lack of involvement or indifference to organised party politics was the most important feature."[10]

If there is a problem of governability — and the examples given leave little doubt that there is — most of its elements are probably assembled in this illustration. However, before examples are taken further, there is a case for making sure that it is clear what we are talking about. Our concern is with governments, and essentially with national governments, or perhaps I should say with central governments of the units which we have come to recognise as countries, or states. For them to work —

or so I shall argue without any claim to originality - two things have to be present: effectiveness and legitimacy. Effectiveness is a technical concept. It simply means that governments have to be able to do things which they claim they can do, as well as those which they are expected to do; they have to work. Legitimacy, on the other hand, is a moral concept. It means that what governments do has to be right. This takes us straight into the confusions of moral philosophy, of course.

Suffice it to say here that what is "right" in the sense of giving legitimacy to governments has at least two aspects. One is that of absolute moral imperatives, or, slightly less ambitiously put, that of values which may be assumed to apply to all human societies. What we call human rights, even, in the most general sense, the rule of law, belongs in this category. Then there are values which, while still of long-term validity, are culturally determined; they vary, and they change. We have to assume that democracy belongs in this category, that is the institutions which, by enabling all citizens to express their views, make change possible without revolution. The category also includes Max Weber's patterns of legitimation, at any rate those of "traditional" and of "legal" or "rational authority". A government is legitimate if what it does is right both in the sense of complying with certain fundamental principles, and in that of being in line with prevailing cultural values. Written constitutions, where they exist, usually begin by spelling out the values which make the actions of the state legitimate, and then proceed to describe the institutions which are intended to guarantee effectiveness. A Bill of Rights has to do with legitimacy, electoral reform has to do with effectiveness in this sense.

How do we measure effectiveness, and legitimacy? The temptation has always been great to be too idealistic in this respect. Political education has tended to emphasise general consent and participation as a condition of effectiveness; in fact, it would seem that the absence of effective protest is good enough. People are not political beings except as political "fleets in being", in the normal course of events, participation is nice, but not indispensable. What is important is the possibility of participation in order to veto developments, to express dissent. (Admittedly, to mention this practical point in passing, it is difficult to assess how much of James Alt's "Jack of involvement or indifference" is normal disinterest, and how much is dissent or opposition by abstention.) Legitimacy, similarly, should be measured not in terms of the active will of all, or even some fictitious general will, but in terms of doubt, of a perceived dissociation of government action and basic as well as cultural values. Again, the distinction is important. When governments violate values which apply to all societies, they may not meet with doubts by the majority. This is where minorities have a crucial function: dissidents, human rights groups, underground publications, "flying" universities. By contrast any dissociation of government action and prevailing cultural values, be it due to the imposition of an alien government, the alienation of an indigenous government or changes in cultural values, is bound to find

expression in widespread doubts of one kind or another. In our context, the important question is whether changes in prevailing values are taking place which, while barely perceptible as yet, may well in due course expose the alienation of traditional democratic governments. I do not want to take the conceptual discussion too far, but one further point is indispensable for the following argument. I said that a Bill of Rights was to do with legitimacy, and electoral reform with effectiveness. Could it not be the other way round? Is not electoral reform intended to re-establish belief in the fundamental fairness of the political system, whereas a Bill of Rights merely regulates effective relations between politics and the judiciary? Conceptual sophistry apart, it is clear that effectiveness and legitimacy are related. The relationship is asymmetrical. Unfortunately, governments can be effective without being legitimate. Totalitarian rule offers the main example. Hitler's rule was certainly effective, but it was not legitimate in that it violated the rule of law deliberately and systematically. It is more difficult to imagine governments which are legitimate without being effective. One is tempted to think of Weimar Germany which has so often been described as the purest democracy of them all; though "pure democracy", like "inner freedom", has a suspicious ring of deception. Over time, ineffectiveness will probably erode legitimacy. A government which cannot do its job, and seems systematically unable to do so, will not only be shown up by protest and dissent, but in the end also by spreading doubt in the name of underlying values, whether they be universal like the rule of law, or culturally specific like the rational or traditional exercise of power.

**What is Ungovernability?**

The notion of governability has to do with the effectiveness of government. In the first instance, it tells us whether governments can cope with what they have on their plate. There is a useful definition of the concept by the historian, Theodor Schieder, who says that "ungovernability" is given if:

1. there is a weakness or complete absence of the expression of a uniform political will because political consensus is lacking,
2. the process of political decision-making is thereby seriously endangered or made impossible,
3. existing institutions based on written or traditional constitutional law and functioning accordingly prove insufficient or completely unsuitable, and
4. thus the function of self-preservation of a political unit — internal and external security, satisfaction of needs in the context of the prevailing, at present steadily growing level of expectations, adaptability to historical change in its different forms as social change, change of values — is put in jeopardy".[11]

This is a tall order. According to Schieder the statement that a society is ungovernable means that it can no longer preserve itself as a polity because it is unable to protect its integrity, to satisfy the needs and expectations of its citizens, and to accommodate change. This in turn reflects on the usefulness of institutions. Schieder's definition appears in a German collection of essays on our subject, entitled *Regierbarkeit* (governability). Its publisher, eager to raise the appeal of the book, printed a laconic statement on the title page: "*The problem*: A horrifying slogan has for some time come to articulate the growing political defeatism of the West: ungovernability of democracies. *The solution*: we must counter technocratic megalomania and the political pusillanimity of the slogan 'ungovernability' by enlightenment about the conditions of reasonable government and the limits of what politics can do."[12] A splendid project — or is it perhaps "reasonable government" itself which has brought about the ineffectiveness of government in the democracies of the OECD countries? And is it "enlightenment" that we need, or are there requirements for tangible institutional reform? Leaving the "horrifying slogan" on one side for the moment, it appears from the (vast) literature as well as from immediate observation that there are three main processes which begin to impair the effectiveness of democratic governments.

The first of these is what has come to be called "overloading". This is, of course, Michael Crozier's great preoccupation; but in his or in other words it has been observed by many.[13] It has been argued that this is not so much an overloading with new objectives of the state (*Staatsziele*) that is at issue as one with new tasks within traditional objectives (*Staatsaufgaben*).[14] Either way, there are few today who would doubt that modern governments have taken on more than they can cope with, and in doing so have partly responded to, and partly generated expectations which were bound to be disappointed. Such disappointments need not be as extreme as those of the gambler who, as he was losing all his savings in a casino, told himself that surely the State, which had given the casino its licence, would not wish him to be impoverished to the point of destitution. He actually wrote a book about his experience which contains the ringing — and telling — accusation: "What kind of State is it that does not prevent people who have been caught by the gambling passion from falling into the certain abyss and which then leaves them miserably alone?"[15] What kind of State indeed? One begins to understand why Milton Friedman not only opposes the licensing of casinos, but even the banning of marijuana, indeed of heroin, so that the state is not involved at all in people's misery.

More seriously (though the example is not to be dismissed lightly), there are two areas in particular in which the State has taken on responsibilities, and has come to be expected to deliver, in which it is now apparent that its limits are closer than many expected: economic policy, and social policy. In the field of economic policy, governments appear to have come up against human values, and the difficulties of

manipulating them. There is no simple answer to the problem of inflation; and Alt may well be right that it is bound to lead to further estrangement from the political system. But this much is clear that there is no endemic inflation as long as people's expectations of their standard of living, and their ability to produce coincide. The ability to produce — productivity — can, of course, be raised. But if it is not raised enough, expectations will have to come down to cope with the problem. Yet there is relatively little that government can do to dampen expectations. In the field of social policy, at least two restrictions of the effectiveness of government are apparent today. One is financial. The systems of social policy built into most welfare states involve an automaticity almost like the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Community. This means that they reach ceilings of taxability, especially if demographic changes take place which tilt the balance further towards recipients of help and against contributors.

**The Price of Bureaucratisation**

The other limit of social policy has to do with the clumsiness of planning, and the price of bureaucratisation. It is probably an impermissible extrapolation to predict that by the year 2000 there will be, in the National Health Service, one administrator for every patient; but there is a trend not only towards larger but towards less effective organisation.

The first problem of governability, then, is that of "overloading". The second process which has begun to impair the effectiveness of modern government has to do with the space in which it operates. Few institutions seem more jealous of their position than the nation-state. Government and Parliament make a great song and dance about "sovereignty" whenever the question of a redistribution of powers arises. But of course they cannot prevent it. Issues are stronger than institutions; and the "productive forces" of the time tend away from national governments to two opposing directions. One is, decentralisation. Most European societies have been through a paradoxical period of institutional change. On the one hand, people were promised more rights of participation at all levels, and were encouraged to become active citizens. On the one hand, "rationalisation" was the order of the day; in the name of this suspicious slogan, local government was all but destroyed in many places. Whether it can be re-established is uncertain. But it is certain that today the pendulum is swinging towards participation rather than rationalisation. It may be that "small is beautiful"; certainly it is more effective in many respects. We have somehow gone over the top of all economics of scale, in human terms, but also in technical terms. Thus, government, industry and organisations alike are rediscovering the smaller dimension; and I have little doubt that in democratic countries the battle for devolving authority will in the end be won.

But, of course, not everything can be devolved. Scotland alone cannot guarantee an international monetary system. Small firms need access to wider markets. In an age

of Super Powers, even Middle Powers are too weak to defend themselves. No one country can hope to win the fight against poverty in the world. Monetary stability, trade rules, defence organisations, and development are but four examples of subjects which have irreversibly emigrated from the political units to which we have grown accustomed. There is a case for European co-operation, even if the European Communities sadly fail to live up to its requirements. There is a case for a Western alliance. There is a case for joint action on the part of the rich to make sure that at the very least people's basic needs are met everywhere. There is a case for world-wide rules of monetary stability, free trade and a number of other fields. Whoever resists such needs will find himself poorer, weaker, less responsible and, before long, less secure.

But governments resist both the forces for devolution and those for international co-operation. We have noted already that such resistance does not quench the forces themselves; or put differently, governments are not all-important. There is in fact a revival of local politics. Many groupings have emerged in recent years around specific concerns at the local level. The "black economy" at least provides many an example of the success of small businesses. If this is not too far-fetched a comment: people want to belong, which they do neither as cogs in the wheel of a big organisation nor as men and women in the street nor as inhabitants of a high-rise monster. Thus they build their own ligatures where they live and work and play. At the other end, the forces of change have pushed their way through in a less popular though equally effective fashion. In the absence of flexible governmental arrangements transcending nations and continents, private organisations have stepped into the breach. Whatever issues the accountability of transnational companies, or its absence, may raise, there can be no doubt that they have discovered and exploited the potential of wider spaces for action. They demonstrate beyond doubt that ineffective government and effective private action can exist side by side. Suspicions of transnational companies may be well-founded in some respects. It is irresponsible to make fortunes out of the production and sale of cheap tobacco in developing countries. Windfall profits as well as currency manipulations and the sudden closure of factories for reasons of corporate convenience raise many a question. But when all is said and done, there is a case for acknowledging that transnationals have been more effective in recognising the need for wider spaces of action than our rigid and tired governments.

Is there a lesson here? Is it possible that ungovernability, at least with respect to overloading and the stubborn defence of a useless political space, will be overcome by autonomous development? Is there a case for assuming that the hidden hand of new social forces will in the end correct the arrogance of traditional structures of power? The point is worth bearing in mind, though before we pursue it we have to consider the third and most serious process contributing to the declining effectiveness of government.

## The British Example

If one wants to give it a name, one could call it the arteriosclerosis of government, though there are more familiar descriptions, such as corporatism, group politics, even collectivism. Britain has provided the preferred subject of the study of this phenomenon which has to do with Schieder's fourth point, the ability of political communities to absorb new forces and change. The first stage of the process was the gradual dissipation of the Westminster Model which John Mackintosh has described so vividly in his *Government and Politics in Britain*.[16] He shows, above all, "how the executive gained control over parliament", and how government thus became identified with the executive. But the executive did not remain suspended in mid-air. It was soon surrounded by a number of groups, of which political parties are only one, with which arrangements had to be made. At least some of these groups, such as the TUC and the CBI, gradually became "governing institutions". This is Keith Middlemas's term who uses it to describe the development of a "corporate bias" in Britain in the 1920s and 1930s.[17] By the 1950s, a system had come to full bloom which engaged in a veritable "cult of the equilibrium". Decisions were taken, not by adversary politics growing out of the class struggle, but by an organised consensus between government and governing institutions. More extreme analysts of this development have argued that there is a sense in which the end government came to be but one group among others, indeed several groups if one considers the bargains between government departments.[18] These analysts may be right in the world of effectiveness, as it were: this is how things happen. But they are wrong in the world of legitimacy: without government, decisions lack two crucial ingredients, authority and money. Nevertheless, there remains the central point that the Westminster Model has been turned into a bargain process between government and important organisations the result of which is a more-or-less harmony in place of strife.

This is the British example. Others, who have never followed the Westminster Model, have reached the same destination by different routes. In the United States, quite contrary to its constitutional assumptions, there is no simple notion of "the executive"; parts of congress are involved in the great consensus. In continental countries, the State itself has been regarded as an instrument of consensus, if not as the "reality of the moral ideal", and non-adversary consensus is backed up by legal systems of the Roman Law tradition. Everywhere, however, the terms in which Keith Middlemas, in his *Politics in Industrial Society*, describes the way in which the great consensus has gone sour, are applicable. From the "high aspirations" which accompanied the consensus when it was built, it has now sunk to being "the lowest common denominator of policies designed to avoid trouble".[19] And this does not work for very long. The "stagnant mediocrity" of an inflexible system of consensus has revived, or generated for the first time, doubts and conflicts with which the system itself cannot cope. The consensus was meant to bring about massive social changes,

the new deal of a just society; but in the end it became a thoughtless administration of the past. In the 1970s, the rigidity of the system became fully exposed. "Like an overloaded electrical circuit, the system began to blow more fuses than electricians could cope with in that dismal decade."[20]

There is a danger in metaphorical language. It evokes images, and plays on preconceptions without proving anything. However, there are quite fundamental issues which support the point that the "corporate bias" creates new problems without necessarily solving old ones. Such a bias was an appropriate response to a condition in which overriding class interests had dissolved into multiple interests of a more specific character. It could be assumed that there would be, for each of the major concerns of people, an organised group which had access to, or formed itself, "governing institutions". All seemed well, because the bargaining system reflected, or was capable of reflecting, the relative weight of different interests at different times. New concerns could always be absorbed into the system. But then, a new kind of interest emerged. It is the desire of individuals to check the power of large organisations, and to be free of their domination. The concern is paradoxical; the same people feel represented by, say, trades unions and resent their bigness and power. Thus the question is not how to weaken the unions, but how to have them strong and yet safeguard individual liberty. However, the corporate bias cannot make any provisions for this. There cannot be an anti-group group which becomes one of the "governing institutions". Even political parties fail to play this role. As a result, an important concern remains unexpressed in official politics, and that means, it is expressed in unofficial and unpredictable ways, by massive abstention, by votes for parties and candidates outside the consensus, by situational protest, ecological, fiscal or otherwise. This is where the corporate system blows its fuses.

The example provides a partial answer to the question of whether the processes which have impaired effective government are important. They are. Their symptoms are everywhere, and there is little reason to believe that they will go away. This becomes even more clearly evident if we ask ourselves why it is that we have reached this position.

There are at least two answers to this question, one conjectural and one structural. Samuel Huntington was the first to argue that the "crisis of democracy" is a reflection of changing economic circumstances.[21] Democracy worked as long as the contest for higher expectations built into its structures promised some success. As long as a governing party could deliver at least some of the goods, all was well. But once economic growth - the necessary condition of the ability of governments to respond to expectations the increase of which they themselves had to stimulate — became more difficult, democratic governments were in trouble. If there is, say, the beginning of a Kondratieff cycle which means a quarter-century of low growth or even decline, democratic politics has no way of coping. It is only — thus Huntington's

conclusion — by introducing elements of authoritarianism that we can survive the long slump. Leaving this conclusion on one side, there is much that seems persuasive in the argument. Yet in a crucial sense it begs the question: why is it that economic growth has become more difficult?

The point can be made in a different way. Britain has a great deal of experience with the politics of economic decline. Yet a century of low, at times "negative" growth has in fact not led to the decadence of political democracy. On the contrary, Britain is one of a mere handful of countries in the world in which democracy has survived the ups and downs of this century. Economic growth is in fact no more than one symptom of a much deeper process. Growth, too, has become difficult for reasons which have to do with its own assumptions; unmanageable size and the accompanying cost of research, development and investment, provide but one significant example; changes in values (from a "protestant" to a hedonist ethic) and satiation if not of markets then of human capacity to absorb innovation are others. The same principle applies to the processes of government as well: the very assumptions on which modern, "reasonable" government is based have created the problems to which we have spoken.

John Mackintosh has seen this clearly; "Thus while the Westminster Model was never reconstructed or revised, the continuation of trends such as the extension of the right to vote, the consequent growth of parties, the new demands of the electorate and the complex administration required to fulfil these demands all affected it, introducing new elements and finally altering the balance between institutions".[22] By developing its own assumptions, parliamentary democracy turned into corporate democracy. The machine of corporate democracy in turn has run hot and is about to crank to a halt. Similarly, the assumptions of a community of citizens whose rights extended from the legal to the political and the social sphere led of necessity to an increase in government activity, to big government, until in the end its very bigness prevents government from moving ahead. And the vested interests, that go with big government and the "governing institutions" which surround it, are such that a change in relevant spaces of action goes unnoticed, or rather is resisted in the hope that no one will notice. In the end, as we have seen, government itself wears the Emperor's new clothes. The declining effectiveness of democratic government is, in other words, endemic, or structural. It is a result of its own assumptions; it is one of the contradictions of modernity. The central point is not that too many fuses have been blown for electricians to cope; the point is that we need a different system of fuses and retrained electricians to cope.

It has become fashionable to make proposals for change. Not only is the boundary between description and prescription, analytical and normative statements no longer respected, there is in fact an expectation that the academic lecturer will come up with remedies, the more radical, even outrageous, the better. I shall disappoint

those who expect such a conclusion. There are, to be sure, important proposals to discuss. In passing at least, I have mentioned some of them: a Bill of Rights, electoral reform, the devolution of powers, a new internationalism. But in a sense, programmes are easy to come by, whereas analysis is not. At the risk of appearing unduly gloomy, I propose to take my argument a last step further without pretending to have answers.

There are today serious limitations of the effectiveness of democratic government. They concern (to return to Theodor Schieder's definition yet again) both the ability of governments to satisfy rising expectations and their ability to absorb changes in values and social structure. Such limitations are serious. They mean that governments are weak at a time at which it could be argued that we can ill afford such weakness. They also mean that reforms are necessary without it being evident where the ideas of the future should come from. For the moment, not only political parties, but intellectuals, too, seem to have run out of ideas. Keith Middlemas involuntarily sums up the problem when at the end of a critical tirade about the ills of democracy, he admits that while change is necessary "the form it will take cannot be seen".[23] We need thought and discussion, publications and even policy research institutes, but they are merely the shell of thought and designs of the future.

Yet there is no reason to think that the dearth of ideas about the future and the resistance of institutions to necessary change must be fatal. In the end, as transnationals, or the "black economy" show, the imagination of reality is greater than that of professors or ministers. For this seems beyond doubt: Neither the "unloading" of functions nor recognition of appropriate spaces nor the acknowledgement of individual rights in a group society are in principle outside the orbit of democratic governments. Changes are likely to be painful, but they are not impossible. Robert Heilbroner has made this point with respect to inflation. Inflation is, in his analysis, the latest malady of capitalism. But capitalism has coped before: With poverty, with trusts and cartels, with depressions. In every case, coping was costly. Again with inflation, major cataclysmic events are likely before the obvious solution is implemented: "permanent wage and price controls" and "a sufficiently heavy and well-directed structure of taxation [to] prevent a build up of purchasing power.[24] But, Heilbroner adds: "in the end, I believe that capitalism will again evidence its extraordinary institutional and ideological flexibility and will accept the necessary text 'socialistic' steps as the only means by which it can extend its nervous, expansionary life". It is not just capitalism which has this ability to adjust, but even more so the open society and its political institutions which are, after all, designed to accommodate change without revolution. Yet, when this is said, and even done, one wonders: is this all? What about the famous "crisis of legitimacy" of modern, late capitalist, democratic corporatist societies? Are we not faced with a deeper malady? Are there not endemic threats greater than the challenges of

reform of which we have spoken? Has the declining effectiveness of government not begun to affect its legitimacy in the democratic countries of the world?

There is evidently a great temptation to deduce the answer from one's political preconceptions. Habermas, for example — and Middlemas tends to follow him — would like to think that we are faced, if not with a proletarian revolution, then with some other great historica1 earthquake; and as a result he tends to introduce the notion of a "crisis of legitimacy" first and then seek material to support it.[25] Heilbroner, on the other hand, allows his social democratic pragmatism to reject the notion of a crisis of legitimacy out of hand; he assumes that somehow or other problems will be worked out, or will work themselves out. If one is neither a critical theorist nor a dogmatic pragmatist, the answer is less cosy. It is really that we do not know for sure, but that there are signs which point to more serious cataclysms than a mere crisis of effectiveness would suggest. There are in particular threats to liberty which arise from the unpredictability — dare one say, the predictable unpredictability of governments which are alienated from people's values, worried about self-preservation, and faced with the ultimate threats to governability and to survival.

I have hinted once or twice at a condition which I have described as the alienation of government. What this means is quite simple. On the one hand, a certain system and practice of government produces problems, endemic problems like, say, the inability to satisfy expectations which the process of government has raised or implied. On the other hand, people's expectations turn away from government. While government desperately, and vainly, attempts to live up to its self-imposed aims, people have long decided to look for other ways to safeguard their life chances. It is as if the carpet is pulled away from underneath government. But government tries to resist: a situation in which it is not surprising that Samuel Huntington and others demand a return to authority, if not authoritarianism.

This is most dramatically evident if we consider the basic functions of government. It seems that today the conflict between the prevaling social democratic consensus which informs the ineffectual actions of government, and the values which haltingly and tentatively, but no less clearly inform people's actions, has reached the social contract itself (Thomas Hobbes's social contract, not Jack Jones's, to be sure). Government is still very largely, and understandably, about increasing people's options, about what has come to be called, somewhat misleadingly, "liberalisation". People, on the other hand, begin to wonder what these options are for. They find that options make little sense if one is not anchored in a framework of social ties, ligatures. So they look for ligatures, often desperately, as in Jonestown, or perversely, as in drug abuse, or in criminal gangs. There is, in other words, a real problem of holding society together, of social control, and it could be argued that few things are clearer indices of declining legitimacy than problems of the

fundamental social contract. The return of a war of all against all documents doubt in the ability of governments to do what they were initially set up to do. Governments are not unaware of this dilemma. So they translate the social contract into "law and order", and this in turn into the "short, sharp treatment" of offenders, only to find that it makes matters worse. Once again, there is a great danger that the response to a crisis of legitimacy will be authoritarianism and illiberty.

This, then, takes us back to the frightening question with which I began this lecture. Who will save us from disaster? Karl Jaspers' recommendation, not to lose hope, is fine but hardly enough. Raymond Aron — not, to be sure, a Hegelian, despite his somewhat abstract terminology — gave what is the only possible answer: "In the nuclear age, the only chance that mankind will be saved from itself is that the intelligence of the personified State will bring armaments under control".[26] The "intelligence of the personified state", that is the capacity of governments to comprehend and to do the right thing. But does it exist? The potential of destruction, so we said, takes us to the limits of governability; it is too great for the moral and intellectual weaknesses of man. These weaknesses need, of course, not be tempted. The intelligence of the personified State can be such at least that the ultimate threat remains remote and unlikely. This is where the effectiveness, and above all, the legitimacy of governments comes in. Illegitimate governments are worried governments. The new authoritarianism documents their worries with respect to security within societies. Outside, with respect to external security, worried governments are liable to make every mistake in the book. This is why the danger is so great that widespread doubts in the effectiveness of governments turn into doubts in their legitimacy. A free society does not need a strong government. It may indeed fare better if government is fairly inactive and quiet. But a free society needs an unworried government, and that means one which is effective where necessary and legitimate throughout.

• The author is Director of the London School of Economics, and the article is the revised text of the first John P. Mackintosh Memorial Lecture delivered at the University of Edinburgh on May 9, 1980.

[1] Miles Kahler, "Rumours of War: the 1914 Authology", *Foreign Affairs* (New York, Winter 1979/80), pp. 374-396.

[2] Sir John Hacknett, *Third World War* (Sidgwick and Jackson, London, 1978).

[3] Carl Friedrich von Weizsacker, *Wege in der Gefahr* (DTV, Munich, 1979), pp. 110, 118.

[4] Karl Jaspers, *Die Atombombe und die Zukunft des Menschen* (Munich, 1968).

[5] James E. Alt, *The Politics of Economic Decline* (Cambridge U.P., Cambridge, 1979).

[6] James E. Alt, *ibid.* Chap. 7.

[7] James E. Alt, *ibid.* p. 206.

[8] *Cf.* D. Butler and D. Stokes, *Political Change in Britain* (Macmillan, London, 1975).

[9] James E. Alt, *op. cit.* p. 157.

[10] *Ibid.* p. 270.

[11] Theodor Schieder, "Einmaligkeit oder Wiederkehr", in *Regierbarkeit. Studien zu ihrer Problematisierung*, edited by Wilhelm Hennis, Peter Graf Kielmannsegg and Ulrich Matz (Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart, 1977), p. 31.

[12] *Regierbarkeit* (*loc. cit.*).

[13] *Cf.* M. Crozier's contribution to Michael J. Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington, Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy* (New York U.P., New York, 1975).

[14] Thus by Ulrich Matz, "Der uberforderte Staat", in *Regierbarkeit* (*loc. cit.*).

[15] Frank Hordan, *Die Banken des Satans* (Hordan-Verlang, Tirschenreuth, 1980).

[16] John Mackintosh, *The Government and Politics of Britain* (Hutchison, 1977).

[17] Keith Middlemas, *Politics in Industrial Society* (Andre Deutsch, 1979).

[18] *Cf.* J. J. Richardson and A. G. Jordan, *Governing Under Pressure* (Martin Robertson, Oxford, 1979).

[19] Keith Middlemas, *ibid.* p. 429.

[20] Keith Middlemas, *ibid.* p. 459.

[21] *Cf.* Samuel Huntington's contribution to Michel Crozier *et al.* (*loc. cit.*).

[22] John Mackintosh, *ibid.* p. 459.

[23] Keith Middlemas, *ibid.* p. 463.

[24] Robert Heilbroner, "Inflationary Capitalism", *The New Yorker* (October 8, 1979). pp. 121-141.

[25] *Cf.* Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimations probleme im Spatkapitalismus* (Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1979). See also Keith Middlemas, *ibid.* Chap. 15.

[26] Raymond Aron, *Penser la Guerre, Clausewitz* (Gallimard, Paris, 1978), Vol. II.