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FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REALISM

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PARLIAMENT

House of Commons: February 6, 1952.

Death of King George VI

It having pleased Almighty God to take to His Mercy Our late Most Gracious Sovereign Lord King George of blessed memory, who departed this life this day, at Sandringham House;

And the House being met;

The Prime Minister (Mr. Winston Churchill): Mr. Speaker, the House will have learned with deep sorrow of the death of His Majesty King George VI. We cannot at this moment do more than record a spontaneous expression of our grief. The Accession Council will meet at 5 o'clock this evening, and I now ask you, Sir, to guide the House as to our duties.

Mr. Speaker: I shall suspend the Sitting of the House until 7 o'clock. When the House resumes at that hour, I shall myself take and subscribe the Oath, according to law, and give an opportunity to right hon. and hon. Members to do the same. . .

Mr. SPEAKER left the Chair.

Mr. SPEAKER resumed the Chair at Seven o'Clock;

And His late Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council, and others, having met and having directed that Her Royal Highness the Princess Elizabeth, Duchess of Edinburgh, be proclaimed Queen on Friday at Eleven of the clock by the Style and Title of Elizabeth the Second;

Mr. SPEAKER alone took and subscribed the Oath;

Several other Members present took and subscribed the Oath or made and subscribed the Affirmation required by Law.

House of Commons: February 11, 1952.

Message from Queen Elizabeth II

The Prime Minister (Mr. Winston Churchill) at the Bar, acquainted the House that he had a Message from Her Majesty the Queen to this House, signed by Her Majesty's own hand. And he presented the same to the House, and it was read out by *Mr. SPEAKER* as followeth, all the Members of the House being uncovered:

"I know that the House of Commons mourns with me the untimely death of my dear Father. In spite of failing health he upheld to the end the ideal to which he pledged himself, of service to his Peoples and the preservation of Constitutional Government. He has set before me an example of selfless dedication which I am resolved, with God's help, faithfully to follow."

ELIZABETH REGINA."

Motions for Addresses of Sympathy

The Prime Minister: . . . I have three Motions to propose which, though they will be put separately from the Chair, should be read all at once, and I shall confine what I have to say in support of them, in accordance with precedent, within the compass of a single speech.

First, there is the Address to the Queen. I beg to move:

"That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty to convey to Her Majesty the deep sympathy felt by this House in the great sorrow which she has sustained by the death of The late King, Her Majesty's Father, of blessed and glorious memory;

To assure Her Majesty that His late Majesty's unsparing devotion to the Service of His Peoples and His inspiring example in the time of their greatest peril will always be held in affectionate and grateful remembrance by them;

To express to Her Majesty our loyal devotion to Her Royal Person and our complete conviction that She will, with the Blessing of God, throughout Her Reign work to uphold the liberties and promote the happiness of all Her Peoples."

We shall also resolve as follows:

"That a Message of condolence be sent to the Queen Mother tendering to Her the deep sympathy of this House in Her grief, which is shared by all its Members, and assuring Her of the sincere feelings of affection and respect towards Her Majesty which they will ever hold in their hearts."

Then there is the Motion for a message to Queen Mary:

"That a Message of condolence be sent to Her Majesty Queen Mary tendering to Her the deep sympathy of this House in Her further affliction and assuring Her of the unalterable affection and regard in which Her Majesty is held by all its Members."

. . . King George V succeeded to a grim inheritance; first, to the fiercest party troubles I have ever seen and taken part in at home, and then to the First World War with its prodigious slaughter. Victory was gained, but the attempt to erect, in the League of

Nations, a world instrument which would prevent another hideous conflict, failed. The people of the United States realise today how grievous was the cost to them, in life and treasure, of the isolationism which led them to withdraw from the League of Nations which President Wilson had conceived and which British minds had so largely helped to shape.

The death of King George V, in January, 1936, was followed in less than a year by the abdication, on personal grounds, of King Edward VIII, and the Sovereign whose death we lament today then succeeded his brother. No British monarch in living memory had a harder time. It is true that the party and constitutional quarrels about the House of Lords and Ireland seemed more violent under King George V than those which we have had among ourselves since, but the greatest shocks fell upon our island in the reign of King George VI.

His first three years were clouded by the fears of another world war, and the differences of opinion, and indeed bewilderment, which prevailed about how to avert it. But the war came and never, in our long history, were we exposed to greater perils of invasion and destruction than in that year when we stood all alone and kept the flag of freedom flying against what seemed, and might easily have proved to be, overwhelming power.

The late King lived through every minute of this struggle with a heart that never quavered and a spirit undaunted; but I, who saw him so often, knew how keenly, with all his full knowledge and understanding of what was happening, he felt personally the ups and downs of this terrific struggle and how he longed to fight in it, arms in hand, himself.

Thus passed six more years of his reign. Victory again crowned our martial struggles, but our island, more than any other country in the world, and for a longer period, had given all that was in it. We had victory with honour and with the respect of the world, victor and vanquished, friend and foe alike.

Alas, we found ourselves in great straits from the exertions which we had made, and then there came, in the midst of the ordeals of the aftermath and of the problems which lay about us, a new menace. The surmounting of one form of mortal peril seemed soon only to be succeeded by the shadow of another. The King felt—as the Leader of the Opposition, who was his first Minister for so long, knows well—the fresh anxieties which thronged up against us and the disappointment that followed absolute triumph without lasting security or peace.

Though deeply smitten by physical afflictions, he never lost his courage or faith that Great Britain, her Commonwealth and Empire, would in the end come through. Nor did he lose hope that another hateful war will be warded off, perhaps to no small extent by the wisdom and experience of the many realms over which he ruled. As I have said, his was the hardest

reign of modern times. He felt and shared the sufferings of his peoples as if they were his own. To the end he was sure we should not fail; to the end he hoped and prayed we might reach a period of calm and repose. We salute his memory because we all walked the stony, uphill road with him and he with us.

Let me now speak of his Consort, the Queen Mother, to whom our second Motion is dedicated. The thoughts of all of us go forth to her. It was with her aid that King George was able to surmount his trials. Let no one underrate what they were. To be lifted far above class and party strife or the daily excitements of internal politics, to be restrained within the strict limits of a constitutional Sovereign—in his case most faithfully upheld—and yet to feel that the fate and fortunes of the whole nation and of his realms were centred not only in his office but in his soul, that was the ordeal which he could not have endured without the strong, loving support of his devoted and untiring wife and Consort. To her we accord, on behalf of those we represent, all that human sympathy can bestow.

The third Motion is addressed to Queen Mary, who has now lost another of her sons, one killed on active service, the other worn down in public duty. May she find comfort in the regard and affection which flow to her from all who have watched and admired her through these long years when her example has inspired not only her family, but all the British people.

The House will observe in the Royal Proclamation the importance and significance assigned to the word "Realm." There was a time—and not so long ago—when the word "Dominion" was greatly esteemed. But now, almost instinctively and certainly spontaneously, the many States, nations and races included in the British Commonwealth and Empire have found in the word "Realm" the expression of their sense of unity, combined in most cases with a positive allegiance to the Crown or a proud and respectful association with it. Thus we go forward on our long and anxious journey, moving together in freedom and hope, spread across the oceans and under every sky and climate though we be.

So far I have spoken of the past, but with the new reign we must all feel our contact with the future. A fair and youthful figure, Princess, wife and mother, is the heir to all our traditions and glories never greater than in her father's days, and to all our perplexities and dangers never greater in peace-time than now. She is also heir to all our united strength and loyalty. She comes to the Throne at a time when a tormented mankind stands uncertainly poised between world catastrophe and a golden age. That it should be a golden age of art and letters, we can only hope—science and machinery have their other tales to tell—but it is certain that if a true and lasting peace can be achieved, and if the nations will only let each other alone an immense and undreamed of prosperity with culture and leisure ever more widely spread can come,

perhaps even easily and swiftly, to the masses of the people in every land.

Let us hope and pray that the accession to our ancient Throne of Queen Elizabeth II may be the signal for such a brightening salvation of the human scene.

Mr. C. R. Attlee (Walthamstow, West): I rise to support, on behalf of all my Friends on this side of the House, the Motions which have been moved in such fitting and eloquent terms by the Prime Minister. . .

. . . We offer to Queen Elizabeth, to the Queen Mother, to Queen Mary, and to all the Royal Family our deepest sympathy in their great sorrow. We know that Parliament today is truly representative of the feelings of the nation. If any comfort can come to the bereaved in the knowledge that millions in Britain, in the Commonwealth and Empire and in other lands share their grief, they have it in full measure.

King George VI . . . took great interest in social questions, especially in the welfare of industrial workers. He grew to have a wide knowledge of social and industrial problems. He was never happier than when in the camps for boys of all classes which he organised, and when he joined in their games.

Happy in marriage and in his family life, it might well have seemed that his lot was cast in easy and pleasant places. But in circumstances of great difficulty he was called upon to take up the burden of kingship. He responded to that call with the high sense of duty which was, I think, his outstanding characteristic.

It was his fate to reign in times of great tension. He could never look round and see a clear sky. There were always dark clouds of anxiety. The early years of his reign were overshadowed by the increasing danger of war. Then came the years of war during which he shared to the full in the perils and anxieties of his people. When peace came, it did not bring tranquillity. Through it all his courage never failed. He never doubted that we should win through. . .

. . . In King George we have lost a great King, and a very good man. We turn to offer our loyal service to our young Queen. She comes to the Throne with the goodwill and affection of all her subjects. She takes up a heavy burden, but I am confident that she will sustain it. It is our hope that Her Majesty may live long and happily and that Her reign may be as glorious as that of her great predecessor, Queen Elizabeth I. Let us hope we are witnessing the beginning of a new Elizabethan Age no less renowned than the first. We hope that Her Majesty the Queen and her Consort may live long and prosperously and may see more peaceful days than those which fell to the lot of His late Majesty whose loss we mourn today.

Mr. Clement Davies (Montgomery): Today, in this House of Parliament, in this country, and through-

out the Commonwealth and Empire, we are one people, one family, who together mourn the passing of our King our leader and our friend. Associated with the sadness of our mourning is a high exalted pride that to us was given such a man as King, as leader and as friend.

With all that has been so well and rightly said by the two right hon. Gentlemen, we humbly express our own full and sincere concurrence. His personality, his character, his courage, both moral and physical, his conscientious, selfless devotion to duty, his modesty, friendliness and understanding, his warm-hearted kindness that has made the Royal Family a pattern to all—to all these qualities tributes have been rightly paid throughout the world. With full hearts, in deep and solemn gratitude, we avow and confess our debt to him for his work, his care, his kindly thoughtfulness and above all, for the shining example that he set as a son, as a husband and as a father.

. . . To our Gracious Queen we swear our willing and ready allegiance. We know full well the heavy burden that she has now so courageously undertaken. She has as her own personal possession the loving devotion and affection of all her people. We are as one in our earnest desire for the welfare of herself and her family.

We pray that God, in His infinite mercy, will grant her health and strength. As she, in the words of her own pledge given on 21st April, 1947, dedicated herself to the service of her people, so we in our turn pledge ourselves in solemn dedication to Her Majesty to work for her and to work with her for the accomplishment of the great task—the welfare of all her people. God save our Gracious Queen, God bless our Queen.

Lieut-Colonel Walter Elliot (Glasgow, Kelvingrove): Mr. Speaker, in the suddenness of the stroke which has come upon us, the Father of the House is, I understand, not able to be present, and I think it is perhaps not inappropriate that support for this Motion should come from the back benches also, for the King in Britain is a King in Council, and Parliament is the completion of the Sovereignty of the Realm. The task before the Monarch is made infinitely easier by the knowledge, which I am sure the late King possessed and now the Queen possesses, of the support of this House and I believe of Parliament.

We had the experience of seeing through together the blitz, the attack upon London. I remember well the spontaneous revulsion of feeling in the House when it was suggested that it should quit London, and I believe the same feeling was shared by the late King. We saw it through together, and it made a bond of unity which I believe reinforced even the great bonds of unity between the King and his people which existed before.

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Saturday, February 23, 1952.

From Week to Week

"To take money from us in order to give it back to us in some other form." "The citizen's money." "Taking from the citizen a part of his earnings and spending it for him." "Your own money."

Phrases such as these detract seriously from any argument in which they are used unless they are introduced to point out the utter falsity of conception which underlies them. Money is a highly technical subject and any man who stakes his life and happiness upon an understanding of it which he does not possess is in a fair way to lose both. Millions have done it. In practice and in effect, citizens have no money. They use money the ownership of which is claimed by the banking system. However false the claim, 'the citizen' acknowledges it—and, of course, takes the consequences which follow upon this concession. 'Citizens' don't receive their earnings; they receive what is permitted to them by those who decide what their 'earnings' shall be—in quality and in quantity. To speak of the 'forms' of money is as absurd as it would be to speak of the forms of speed. Neither an aeroplane nor sixty miles an hour is a form of speed. The latter is a rate and the former a construction which may travel at that rate or at another rate. Money is a rate. These objections are not of merely academic interest: inattention to them is the material for the misgovernment of the modern world. If adherence to false axioms such as those which underlie the phrases cited is persisted in, it does not matter what else is stated side by side with it—assuming a connection to be presumed.

And so we think about some passages in two articles in last Sunday's newspapers. Nevertheless, they may have some significance, if only in charting our present position on the slippery slope. An anonymous 'correspondent' of *The Sunday Times* writes as follows (extracts):—

"... In recent years discussion of the Budget has soared into the economic empyrean. A whole new jargon has arisen to obscure its meaning from the ordinary taxpayer. It has, in addition, become the financial expression of a political philosophy."

"The first Budget of the new Government, to be opened on March 4, presents Mr. Butler with the opportunity to bring the Budget back to earth. It is, after all, the taxpayers' money that is being spent, and the basic consideration should be how he desires it to be spent—and how much of it—not how Whitehall believes it would be best for his money to be spent."

"Much [expenditure other than defence, etc.] consists of taking from the citizen a part of his earnings or other income and spending it for his benefit in a way he might not otherwise choose but which, it is argued, will be better

for him. Were this distinction between the two classes to be made clear in the presentation of the Budget, it would be an important step towards enabling both Parliament and the people to understand to what they were being asked to give consent."

"The legacy of the past prevents Mr. Butler from discarding in total the Budgetary consequences of the doctrine that it is the duty of the State to control our behaviour, to spend half our money for us, and to leave us no margin to save. Yet the Budget can, and let us hope will, unmistakably reveal a reversal of trend. It can herald the return to that freer condition in which alone the country's urgent desire to work and earn will find release."

In other words, the Budget is merely a record of speculation. We have said so before. The author does not say it need not be so. All he says is that the speculation might be adjusted to another political philosophy than that which is presumed to have ruled solely during the recent past.

The second reference which interests us is one which has association (though it may be only for us) with a well-known suggestion of Major Douglas's for inducing the co-operation of retailers in applying the price-adjustment factor. It is from the *Sunday Express*. We give it in full from the leading article:—

"If the tax is to be worked like previous E.P.Ts.—by taxing the difference between current profits and those earned in some arbitrary "standard" year—it will do nothing to bring prices down.

"But why not take into account the relationship between profits and turnover?"

"A company making good profits from selling a large quantity of goods at low prices would then pay less tax than a company earning a similar profit from a restricted output sold at high prices.

"Such a plan would give manufacturers a very real incentive to clip their prices."

But why tax?

• • •

We know precisely just how odious comparisons may be, and, perhaps for that reason, we remark that to Bernard Marmaduke Fitzalan-Howard, Earl Marshal, has descended the most ancient of the English Dukedoms. The first Duke of Norfolk was created so in 1483. By common consent, the funerary ritual associated with the death of King George VI was so perfectly-executed a piece of pageantry, far surpassing anything within living memory, that not even the thugs of the Press, a camera replacing a 'gun' in every hip-pocket, could spoil it. (And how they tried!) The politicians, from whom our ills descend, were far in the background, unnoticed, behind cohorts of our 'effete' aristocracy, organised in eight days by His Grace the Duke of Norfolk. If there must be a 'reform of the House of Lords,' their lordships should strike now while the iron is too hot for caucuses (caulkers?) to hold it.

There is, by the bye, some discussion as to who controls the Press!

• • •

"*Le mot le plus précieux de notre langue? Eh bien, mon enfant, c'est le mot Qui, employé interrogativement. Là réside le génie de Pascal et même de Montaigne. C'est vraiment le génie de la France.*" And of all countries without exception. And all countries without exception are 'under the heel' (and no questions asked).

A Bit of Board Hunting

by GEOFFREY DOBBS.

PREAMBLE: Power can be distributed, or centralised; it cannot be destroyed—or augmented. The formidable power centralised in institutions has a depressing effect on the morale of individuals unless they realise that there is always a compensating factor. The power centralised in the State is taken from the individual citizens composing it, but, contrary to the popular misconception, it is taken in *greater* measure from those more directly under control of the State than from those less directly so; more from the bureaucrat than from the private citizen; more even from a man in his function of bureaucrat than from the same man outside that function.

This is the 'soft under-belly' of the totalitarian monster. It is a matter of common experience that the agent of centralised power is deprived of the free use of most of his faculties. In particular, he may not use truth, or common sense, or even the criteria of ordinary sane human intercourse, on his own initiative, or in any other but the prescribed manner, and as a consequence no bureaucracy can avoid emitting a stream of nonsense accompanied by a never-ending succession of blunders such as would be accepted as ample proof of insanity in any private individual. In fact, the clue to the tactical situation is that a centralised bureaucracy is one of the most ridiculous, vulnerable, and fallible things on earth, and it is made all the more ludicrous when it adopts, in its role of special agency of the Almighty (meaning the State, which has replaced God in so many minds) a pompous pretence of infallibility, omniscience and omniscience.

The danger is that the continuous flood of nonsense which comes from officials and is already beginning to be accepted with indifference, by mere habit, as 'normal,' shall invade the private side of life and replace therein ordinary good sense and honest dealing. This is, in fact, happening, and it makes resistance necessary; though a man cannot fight a flood, he can only fight people; but when the people constitute a mob, selection is necessary. In practice, in the case of the bureaucrats they may be left to select themselves, as they inevitably will from time to time, by presenting a more than usually vulnerable target. At first, at any rate, the citizen should practice on 'easily caught game,' but the bottom grade of bureaucrat is so like a sitting rabbit that (except for an occasional pert specimen) it is soon felt to be rather unsporting to bag them, and the sportsman will seek for wlier game, higher up in the hierarchy, where a few more degrees of freedom are allowed. Finally he comes to the big game which wields enough delegated power to be dangerous, and here skill is needed, but there is a corresponding thrill in the sport, and the results obtained may be considerable.

Some may feel that to treat as a game what is in fact a grim and desperate battle for our freedom is to underestimate its importance, but this would be to misconceive the value and place of genuine sport, particularly among the British people, who have long opposed a very sound, not to mention ribald, resistance to over-earnest or dramatized exhortations. No organised campaign, or brilliant tactical feat, can substantially improve the situation; what is necessary is a change of habit and attitude on the part of the public towards bureaucrats, arising from an improve-

ment in the morale and the realisation that a man is more than a match for a bureaucrat, even if it be himself; for how many of us, these days, can be sure that we shall not wake up one morning and find ourselves nationalised? What is required, in fact, is precisely that attitude which can ruthlessly exploit a man's failings, say, as a goalkeeper or a bowler without finding it in the least necessary to hate him or to cease to be friendly with him. This game, moreover, is to defend the territory of ordinary fair-dealing in society against the continuous bureaucratic pressure, and to invade the enemy's territory as far as possible; and it is not only worth playing, but also thoroughly enjoyable.

Social creditors have been playing this game so long that they are often tempted to forget that it is a game or at least a sport and that it ought to be enjoyed. It is many years now since Major Douglas told us that if people would only give as much keenness and attention to social credit as they are prepared to give to golf, the game could certainly be won. And although institution-hunting is sometimes more dangerous than golf, it does not compare in that respect with the sport of mountaineering, in pursuit of which, last year, twelve people lost their lives in Snowdonia alone—and still they come!

After this preamble, the account which follows of a minor tussle between a consumer and an Electricity Board may come as an anti-climax, but it may be useful as an example.

• • •

The story, then, starts in the summer of 1949, when the Merseyside and North Wales Electricity Board sent in a bill, postmarked June 23, to the writer, hereinafter to be known as the 'Consumer, demanding a surcharge of some 47 per cent. over the standard unit charge, for the quarter ending May 3, 1949. This was accompanied by a printed slip which stated that: "the Government requested Electricity Boards to introduce this surcharge in a desire to persuade consumers to economise in the use of electricity, thus ensuring that industrial requirements would be more fully met during the critical winter months." It was also explained that the Board intended to make no revenue out of the surcharge, although the rebates which were announced to follow it during the summer and autumn months, were at less than one-third of the rate, and could not possibly fail to leave a balance in the Board's favour.

This represented a tower of errors, piled one upon the other, of such height that only a bureaucracy could have accomplished it.

(1) It destroyed price as a real mechanism, and introduced the pernicious Soviet system of arbitrary price manipulation by edict as a means of controlling behaviour;

(2) It was presented as a case of personal rule by officials, at the *request* of politicians, without even the backing, so far as we were informed, of a Statutory Order;

(3) It seemed extremely hard to accord with the statutory duty of the Board to charge prices in accordance with fixed and published tariffs (Section 37 (3) of the Electricity Act 1947), unless the word 'tariff' is rendered almost meaningless;

(4) It discriminated against one class of consumers, and in favour of another, which on the face of it is directly contrary to the provisions of Section 37 (8) of the Act;

(5) Owing to the Board's then lately introduced system of 'cycle billing' it was applied to different consumers on different dates, thus transferring money from one to another in a completely arbitrary manner, according to the dates of meter readings;

(6) For the same reason it was applied to the month of April, even to part of May, which by no stretch could be called 'critical winter months';

(7) Complete nonsense was made of its alleged purpose by its being applied, so far as this Consumer was concerned, retrospectively, the first notice of it having been sent with the bill late in June;

(8) Advertisements inserted in certain selected newspapers were taken as constituting communication to the Board's customers of important changes in their financial liabilities, which is contrary to all acceptable commercial practice;

(9) Consumers were invited to believe that a surcharge of 0.35d. applied to what must be, despite all economies, the heaviest quarter of the year, could be offset by a rebate of 0.1d., applied to the three lighter quarters, including the summer, when consumption is often as low as a quarter of that in the winter;

(10) In this particular Consumer's case, the rebate period stretched on into the following winter quarter when, we had already been warned, further severe economies in consumption would be necessary in the National Interest; and,

(11) These unprecedented price-changes were indicated so obscurely on the bills that many people did not notice them.

The Consumer, accordingly, wrote direct to the Chairman of the Board, in order to give the only official who might have the power to do so the opportunity to use a little common sense and humour and avoid all the trouble which followed, and also to ensure that the Board, if it defended its nonsensical position, could not escape the consequences by blaming the mistakes of minor officials. The hook was taken. The reply, from the Chief Accountant, was civil, even conciliatory, but the Consumer's cheque making payment at the standard rate and ignoring the surcharge, was accepted only as part payment, and the matter was handed down to the Sub-Area. The fun then started!

Every quarter the Consumer paid his bill at the standard rate per unit, ignoring both surcharge and rebate, and thus causing the Board to claim the money it had said it did not intend to 'make' out of the transaction. The floundering attempts of minor officials to defend the position taken up by their seniors were dealt with systematically, and not without a certain enjoyment; with an occasional expression of sympathy with them for the plight in which they had been placed. In due course the rebate period was completed and the Board was left claiming an excess of £1 8s. 0d., more than half the surcharge. At this point it first showed its teeth, with a notice announcing the cutting off of current from the Consumer in default of payment in seven days. This was, typically enough, anonymous except for the Board's heading, but worded in the first person singular! The consumer wrote, offering to pay on receipt of an explanation of what, in the Board's view, constituted its

legal claim to the money. This he did not receive, but the current was not cut off.

A special extra rebate, of which the announcement reached the Consumer the following year, still left the Board claiming £1 0s. 10d., and a second threat to disconnect the supply proved equally to be a bluff. Meanwhile the Sub-Area Office had handed the matter on to the District Officer, who made an appointment to call upon the Consumer and explain it all to him verbally, referring him to the section of the Act which lays a duty on the Board to charge prices in accordance with fixed and published tariffs. The Consumer cordially welcomed this visit and invited the Officer to bring with him a copy of the published tariff, of the fixity of which the surcharge-rebate arrangement had been an example, informing him also that, as it was a matter of great public interest, representatives of the local press and the Chamber of Commerce had agreed to be present. The Officer then wrote declining to come, and this fact was published in a letter to the local paper.

It must be confessed that, about this time, the Consumer was so overcome with sympathy for this unfortunate officer that he offered, in the same letter (*North Wales Chronicle*, May 11, 1951) to pay up, without acknowledgement of liability; but subsequent events hardened his heart. It appeared that the Board was not prepared to produce a tariff, or to refer the Consumer to it, or to specify it in any definite way. Neither was it prepared to reply publicly to questions or criticisms in the Press, even when published under the heading "*Was the Electricity Surcharge a Bluff?*" The Board, however, had its own method of reply.

In June 1951 it sent a letter threatening County Court action. This is always a 'heads I win, tails you lose' gambit on the part of an Institution, and the Consumer realised with horror that if the case were brought he would be in very serious danger of winning it. The consequent appeal might well have been taken as far as the House of Lords, making disastrous demands on his time and nervous energies, and carrying with it the risk of complete financial ruin. Even then, if a famous legal victory were gained, its effects could probably be annulled immediately by the issue of a few more regulations, or, if necessary, by the arrangement of a procession of M.P.'s into the voting lobby by the majority Party Whips. The Law, in fact, no longer protects the individual against the Executive; the individual must find his own sanctions and protect himself.

Fortunately the sanction of exposure is always provided by the incredible blunders of a centralised bureaucracy. The chief danger in this case seemed, to the Consumer, to be that the Monster might blunder into a troublesome onslaught without realising the extent to which it would expose itself. The Consumer accordingly replied: "I shall be glad to hear what the Board has to say for itself in the County Court if that is the only way of finding out what the Board claims to be its powers . . ." and then proceeded to write into the correspondence, for production in Court, an outline of those aspects of the Board's behaviour which seemed to him to require explanation before payment could be regarded as due. Behind this barricade the Consumer sat, pea-shooter in hand, awaiting the onrush of the Board with a certain confidence.

In due course (August 7th) it came: ". . . unless payment is immediately forthcoming, there is no alternative but

to take County Court proceedings." The issue was then narrowed to the Board's most vulnerable point, the production of the relevant tariff, and a cheque was sent to the editor of a national newspaper, which had already telephoned the consumer (on learning of the official's refusal to meet the press) with the suggestion that he should hold it against the production of the Board's tariff. The newspaper then questioned the Board, and seems to have been discouraged from giving publicity to the matter at this stage by the suggestion that the Consumer was an isolated crank. Nevertheless, publicity on a national scale was assured in the event of a Court action.

Incredible as it may seem, at this point the Monster turned tail and fled, bleating that 'at this late stage' it could not produce copies even of its own press notices, and the Consumer, hooting slightly, emerged from his defences and pursued it with relish and with letters exposing the facts in the local press (under the heading 'Will the Board Reply?') and in the *Manchester Guardian* (August 24, 1951) pointing out that the Board preferred "periodic threats to cut off current or bring a court action rather than produce to a consumer the tariff on which they claim to have charged him." But the Board remained silent even when a letter from another correspondent (September 20) pointed out that this silence invited the conclusion that the Consumer had put his finger "on a very vulnerable spot." When the Consumer's quarterly bill came in, the surcharge item was, for the first time, omitted from it, and this fact also was immediately published in a letter to the *Manchester Guardian* (September 22). A week later (September 29) appeared a verse entitled 'Account Rendered' by 'Lucio' (the late Mr. Gordon Phillips) in which he satirised the "nationalised and nincompoop conceit" of the Electricity Authority and its way of treating the public, probably one of the most caustic verses ever written by that usually gentle satirist.

On the same morning the unfortunate Consumer found himself confronted by a headline of large size in the *Daily Express* (Manchester Edn.): PLANNER DOBBS WINS A WAR WITH THE PLANNERS. Anyone who has read his book 'On Planning the Earth' (particularly the paragraphs on inversion, pp. 38-9) will appreciate the inevitable irony of his situation. However, it did give him an opportunity of pointing out to the Editor in no uncertain terms the objectionable nature of the epithet 'Planner,' which had been applied to him on the strength of the title. An apology was received from the journalist responsible, with whom cordial relations were soon established, and a later article (October 17) gave a more accurate picture of the contents of the book and his complaints against the Electricity Board.

Meanwhile, for a time, telephone calls from the Manchester offices of national dailies were frequent, and the Board was also assailed by journalists who extracted some remarkably lame excuses from it. e.g., that the matter was too complicated for a brief statement (*Daily Express*, Sept. 29) and that the correspondence was more expensive than the surcharge (*Daily Dispatch*, October 22). Doubtless the approaching election was responsible for this unusual interest on the part of the Press.

In Bangor the Consumer attended one meeting of each Party, and after drawing attention to the fact that seven out of eleven bills which he had then received from the Electricity

Board showed a price change, asked how the Party in question proposed to remedy this state of bureaucratic chaos, and, in particular, whether it would decentralise the control of the electricity supply. A favourable reply was received from all three, which clearly indicated not so much what the politicians would do, as their estimate of the state of public feeling.

Mr. R. S. (now Viscount) Hudson, who made it clear at the time that he expected to be a member of the Cabinet, welcomed the question and replied that the Conservatives would decentralise the Electricity Boards and restore the distribution of electricity to local government, and in some cases, to private, hands. This reply was reported in the Press (e.g., *Liverpool Daily Post*, and *Daily Dispatch*, October 22). The Liberal candidate, after consulting his Party, replied in writing that his Party would support measures for the decentralisation of all the nationalised industries, and particularly the restoration of electricity distribution to local government hands. The Labour candidate, who was the popular Town Clerk of Bangor, and also the sitting member (who in the event lost his seat by 500 votes to the Conservative) seemed to be placed in something of a dilemma by the question. He agreed, however, that, while decentralisation of the coal industry would be opposed tooth and nail by the Party, it was desirable in the case of the electricity supply, and the Consumer was given an opportunity of pointing out to a not at all unsympathetic Labour Meeting that the difference between 'democratic socialism' and 'totalitarian communism' consisted in one thing only—the degree of centralisation of power.

After the election, in which the Consumer recorded his vote against the rest of the joint Party programme, he wrote to Mr. Hudson, enclosing press cuttings, and asked that the decentralisation of the Electricity Authority should be given an early place in the Government's programme, in view of the absence of Party controversy on the matter. This letter was passed on to Mr. Geoffrey Lloyd, the new Minister of Fuel and Power, who acknowledged it. The attention of Mr. David Llewellyn, Under-Secretary for Welsh Affairs, was also drawn to the matter.

More important, however, than these political moves was the effect on local morale, in which there seemed to be a distinct improvement. There was evidence that many more people were looking carefully at their electricity bills and demanding an explanation of them, and there was a tendency to consult the Consumer, whose letters in the local paper had caused a good deal of amusement, as well as amazement, at the behaviour of the Board. It may have been imagination, but it seemed that officials were being more careful in their treatment of the public, and even the Gas Board, which sent in a bill in error to the Consumer, hastened to apologise just as if it had not been nationalised!

On October 18, in the midst of the election campaign, and the publicity accorded to the Consumer's complaints about the Board's ever-changing tariff and refusal to explain itself, the Caernarvonshire County Council decided, by 45 votes to 4, to oppose "any bill which might be presented to Parliament by the British Electricity Authority if it includes hydro-electricity schemes in the county." The chief argument in favour of this resolution reported in the Press (e.g., *Manchester Guardian* October 19) was that of Dr. William George who "complained of the ever-changing attitude and plans of the Authority." "The Authority has

not been straight. It has been very difficult to get information about this scheme," he said.

It is interesting that the chief opponent of this resolution was the local 'representative' on the Electricity Consultative Council, one of those governmentally appointed bodies, alleged to 'represent' the consumer, but in fact representative only of the Authority. This body had actually 'approved' of the surcharge-rebate arrangement when it was first introduced.

The Bangor City Council later decided to support the County Council in its resolution. The North Wales River Board is also protesting strongly against the proposed schemes. Altogether, there is a new feeling that the Authority is vulnerable, and on the defensive, and that there is a chance of resisting what was formerly regarded as the irresistible steam-roller advance of a nationalised monster. The part played in all this by the light-hearted hunting of the Beast by one consumer is doubtless a small one, and could easily be exaggerated, but it has not been negligible, for it has demonstrated that it can be routed by any individual who cares to take the trouble. An amusing version of the Consumer's story is being distributed by a local Welsh association.

The part played by the national press in this affair must not be over-rated; in fact they did not take a hand until the Board was on the run. 'Man bites Board' is as sensational news as 'Man bites Dog,' but he has to bite the Board first, and the national press will not help him to do it. In any case the big newspapers are too huge and centralised themselves to be reliable allies, but they have illustrated the fact that, as centralisation proceeds, so also does the scope of individual initiative against it. A few years ago a mere insistence by one consumer on a reasonable explanation before paying a completely unprecedented surcharge would have been so normal as to have no news value. Nowadays it hits the headlines. Incidentally, however, the Consumer's embarrassment at the notoriety he imagined must have been conferred upon him by publicity in the big dailies was quite unnecessary. Scarcely anybody of his acquaintance noticed it, for people do not read the daily press, they merely glance at it. In contrast, the local press is far more influential, for every word of it is read with interest, and very often talked about afterwards. The same thing applies to weekly papers of relatively small circulation; they actually exert more influence on thought and action than 'mammoth' publications which are not read seriously.

Those who despair of remedying the situation do so because they believe that mass action is necessary (and the masses are all under centralised control); but they are wrong. Centralised power presses outwards until it reaches a limit, and such a limit can be provided by one person. It is improbable that the Monopoly will attempt to impose another such surcharge until this incident has been forgotten, for the next time it would be unlikely that they would find only one person opposing them. That is something, but it is not enough; for after their vulnerability had been exposed they were allowed to escape. It is obvious that six people in the area could have defeated the Board completely and produced results of altogether greater importance; but six people in the area are not yet sufficiently interested.

If a few hundred people in the whole country took up

board-hunting with the keenness and pertinacity of a sport, the advance of bureaucracy could be stopped: that is the order of size of the problem. Thousands would probably be too many; the weakness of numbers would begin to appear; but if the daily press and the masses come flocking along when the hunt is up, one does not have to bother, they will supply the necessary mass when it is needed. Thus if one man, in a life time, succeeds in recruiting and training by example half a dozen others of the necessary quality he will have achieved possibly one-hundredth of what is needed; by no means an easy, nor yet a hopelessly impossible, task.

Everyone is endowed with the weapons which are effective against a bureaucracy, namely, truth, commonsense, humour, and a good deal of obstinacy. Against these a bureaucracy has, in the last resort, only one defence, and that is to allow the individual bureaucrat who, as a man, is already on our side, also to exercise them. But that is decentralisation of initiative. And that is what we want.

PARLIAMENT—

(continued from page 3).

If I may say one word about his Consort—a countrywoman of some of us—she today has all our sympathies and all our affections. It was an American, and not one of our own people, who wrote of her conduct in the blitz:

"But you put on your shining gown,
Your gayest smile, and stayed in town
When London Bridge was burning down,
My fair lady."

That was a spontaneous tribute, and all the more graceful since it came from others.

Today Parliament as a whole feels itself truly representative of the nation in this Motion which has been so ably moved by the Prime Minister and supported by an ex-Prime Minister and by a party leader. but I do not think support would be complete unless the House of Commons itself added a voice of its own in support of the Motion.

Question put, and agreed to, *nemine contradicente*.

. . . *Sitting suspended at Seven minutes to Three o'Clock until Twenty Minutes to Four o'Clock.*

Then the House proceeded to Westminster Hall in order to attend the lying-in-state of His late Majesty; and, having returned—

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, "That this House do now adjourn till Tuesday, 19th February."—[*Mr. Buchan-Hepburn.*]

Adjourned accordingly at Twenty-three minutes to Five o'Clock, till Tuesday, 19th February.