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### *People in Authority*

SOCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL PROGRESS is impossible where there is no one in authority. There must be someone in control of an operation if anything useful or distinguished is to get done.

"Authority" means having the power to judge and act, to issue instructions and enforce obedience. These are qualities that are not found in committees, but in strong personalities.

A committee, the almost universal sanctuary of people who do not wish to become personally involved in a proposed action, can explore and deplore, but if anything is to be done the job is handed to a person in authority. T. B. Macaulay, statesman, poet, historian and author, wrote: "Many an army has prospered under a bad commander, but no army has ever prospered under a debating society."

There are various titles borne by people in authority: executive, general, prime minister, president, manager, foreman, boss, and many others. Whatever the titular rank, the person in authority is one who directs activities and undertakes the responsibility for reaching certain objectives through those activities.

Administrators must have the qualities required to make their leadership effective. Besides the skills and attitudes necessary to their field of endeavour they need intimate, habitual, intuitive familiarity with things; systematic knowledge about things; and an effective way of thinking about things.

It is essential to society as it is organized today that every citizen should recognize authority, both the need for it and the presence of it. Consider this everyday example. The bus driver is in charge of his bus. He must know the technique of operating his vehicle, how to drive it in traffic, the law of the road, and what to do in an emergency. In addition, he has to know the art of getting along with all sorts of people. Any failure of the driver to use his authority, or any disregard of his authority by passengers, results in inconvenience and danger to those he serves.

The animal kingdom is studded with evidences of creatures in authority, from the pecking order of the birds to the stamping ground of the buffalo. Every mass human activity needs and has an elite, a group of

qualified persons exercising the major share of authority. The excuse for an elite is that it takes the lead and accepts accountability.

For its very existence, human society demands order. No way has been found in modern civilization of producing order without allocating a degree of authority. This is clearly evident in the armed forces, in education, in law enforcement, in business, in government, and in sport. An umpire is a person in authority, and many a hockey player has been thrown out of a game because he failed to recognize this.

The leader is the person who acts when the situation requires action. The masses do not accomplish much in history: they follow the lead of people of purpose, able to plan, fit to administer. Leaders do not use power without caution, but apply their authority with discretion and compassion. Just as it was an error in chivalry for a knight in armour to attack someone who was not a knight, so it is considered unchivalrous for one who is sheltered in a position of power to attack those who are unprotected.

### *The panoply of power*

To seek power for the sake of lording it over fellow creatures or adding to personal pomp is rightly judged base. Power is at its best when it finds its outlet in terms of inspiration and guidance and service.

The desire for power was to the Greeks and the early Christian Church a reason for not giving it. Plato's rulers were to be given absolute power only upon the condition that they did not want it, and a man appointed to the episcopacy in the church was required to say: "I do not want to be a bishop."

Edith Hamilton, first woman ever admitted to the University of Munich, says in *The Greek Way* (W. W. Norton & Co., New York, 1942): "To the Fathers of the Church as to Plato, no one who desired power was fit to wield it." The arrogance that springs from a consciousness of power was the sin the Greeks had always hated most.

Many of the glaring tragedies of human history are those of power seized and wrongly used to exploit,



suppress, intimidate and destroy. When a person is given absolute power to do what he pleases without being required to report, explain or justify his actions you extinguish his fear and thus remove one of the great buttresses of morality.

The person in authority who seeks to live right must administer his business according to the law and with good common sense, efficiency and sympathy. He needs to have the courage to back up his decisions. He cannot issue an order and then run for cover in a forest of documents and an undergrowth of regulations.

A dictator is a person with a lust to govern. He has no friends except those who are friends for fear of the weight of his mailed fist. His exercise of force as a method of governing is reprehensible and unintelligent. The wise administrator knows that the use of force should be preceded by persuasion, but that the presence of an enforcement agency with power and ability to act is a necessary element if one is to be sure of securing and keeping peace, order and good government.

Akin to the dictator in some respects is the person who seeks to get his way by pleading that he is persecuted. He suffers from a mental disorder that is accompanied by delusions of hostility. He imagines injuries from which in fact he has not suffered, or he behaves in such a way as to arouse uncontrollable irritation in others.

### *Ingredients of greatness*

People of mature intelligence are satisfied to be, rather than to seem, the sort of people to whom authority belongs. As Locman remarks in James Morier's *The Adventures of Hajji Baba*: If you are a tiger, be one altogether: if you dress in a tiger's skin and people discover that you have long ears hidden there, they will treat you as if you walked in your own true character, an undisguised ass.

Duty and responsibility are part and parcel of power and authority. You cannot be a leader unless you bear up well under heavy responsibility. There are timid souls who will not take any commission except with others who might bear part of the blame for failure. At the other end of the scale are persons like Admiral Nelson, who wrote to the admiralty: "I have consulted no man, therefore the whole blame of ignorance in forming my judgment must rest with me."

Many people in authority attain enjoyment in life by doing their duty. They possess the essence of power without seeming to desire its trappings. They are not elevated above the crowd by fancy dress or titles. These things do not give ability. A king is not one who holds a sceptre merely, but one who knows how to rule.

Spacious thoughts and clear vision do not arise in people who normally put their personal comfort above the necessities of their office. A small person draped in authority is a small person still. His stance is unsteady, because he must stand on tiptoe or on a platform to

demonstrate his authority. The executive in a large business firm, when chided for making a little too much of his position, told Dr. Henry Yellowlees, the eminent psychiatrist, "I do not think myself half so important as I really am."

The failure of a person in authority to succeed in an enterprise may not be due to a great fault.

Consider the case of Adam and Eve. She desired wisdom and was essentially kind; she was prepared to oblige the talking serpent and at the same time give Adam an unexpected treat. By contrast, Adam's attempt to pass his trespass on to Eve was a bitter disclaimer of his right to hold authority: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat."

The excellence of the person in authority is like a diamond that has many facets. He knows not only what it is right to do but the philosophy and reason behind his actions. He must guard himself against tendencies: to become impersonal, to establish a set of rules and consider his job done, to build a hierarchy, or to specialize on one function of the many involved in administration.

A leader needs wise regulation of his work and just restraints on his conduct. He needs to follow a line of action and thought that will lead him to make right decisions: get the facts, weigh and appraise, take action, and check results.

The value of the judgment of a person in authority is determined by the extent of his acquaintance with the best standards. The most important question a person in authority can ask himself is how his behaviour compares with some recognized high standard.

There can be no substitute for integrity in a person seeking to be a leader. This involves more than simple abstention from crime. It includes adherence to ethical principles and soundness of moral character. Fairness and impartiality are specially needed in the character of a person in authority. He must speak the truth to those under him and keep his promises to everyone, regardless of status.

### *Communication of ideas*

The need for unimpeded communication within organizations is widely recognized. The grape-vine is not a satisfactory medium by which people in authority should learn about workers' wants and complaints.

When communication both upward and downward within a business firm or other association of people is open, accurate, honest and swift, those in authority are placed in the enviable position of being able to correct where improvement is needed and to check rumour before it corrupts morale.

People in authority in the old days were likely to be so completely absorbed with getting things done that they neglected giving information about the whys and wherefores of what was going on. In these days, when



workers are educated at least through high school and are subject to further education by newspapers, magazines, radio and television, more is required. In the absence of constructive, accurate, easy-to-understand and prompt information, the detractors and saboteurs step in.

Some firms have made it easy for employees to communicate by setting up "suggestion boxes". Others have taken a more advanced step: they have established sub-departments where staff people deal with communications from workers under the pledge of anonymity.

Surveys designed to find out what people want reveal their desire for facts. Some top people in their professions — in government, industry and labour — can talk engagingly for fifteen minutes without presenting a single fact about the matter they are talking about. Those who dictate action have a responsibility to define the appropriate responses to be made: to state what has to be done and explain why it must be done.

The person in authority should make clear, unambiguous statements which the people who are affected will interpret in one way and in one way only, with no room for suspicion or misunderstanding.

To carry the word it is necessary to have the skilled services of managers, foremen, and others in the chain of command. As was said in the *Monthly Letter* of May 1961: "Top management may write about policies and targets until their stenographers are exhausted, but their effort is useless unless the front line man explains to his workers the day-by-day application of the policies to the work in hand."

### *Some special qualities*

There are two sides to the exercise of authority: to define and restrain error, and to guide those who are lacking in knowledge. It is the function of the administrator to set things in order when events threaten to menace peace, or to hamper efficiency and good management. Every action the person in authority takes, and every pronouncement he makes in discharge of these duties has consequences.

Nothing makes the person in authority so much esteemed as setting a fine example. Socrates did not profess to be an instructor in morality, but by showing that he himself was honourable and worthy he made those in his society hope that, by imitating him, they would become such as he was. Example has two good effects: it inspires others to seek betterment and it shames them into avoiding errors of which the person in authority would disapprove.

The good administrator is tolerant of other people's ideas, and is not dogmatic about his own. He keeps in mind the necessity of yielding to everyone his rights.

Intolerance of other people's opinions is a mental ailment. Political, social and economic fanatics are to be found everywhere, pursuing their pet theories with

extreme and uncritical zeal. They become a danger to society when they are accepted as leaders rather than as buffoons.

Big-minded executives do not feel called upon to defend their position regardless of whether it is right or wrong. A quite moderate degree of conciliatory behaviour will probably win a good measure of what is desired.

This, of course, demands patience, which includes the ability to proceed in a course of action with reason and prudence. There are people who imperiously demand everything at once, without any idea of growing and becoming. They do not make competent persons in authority.

Finally in this array of special qualities is the necessity to look ahead. Forward planning is an undoubted function of the person in authority, and it is one of industry's greatest deficiencies.

The most common form of maladjustment lies in being too rigid to deal readily and efficiently with the demands of changing situations. Authority survives on its merits from moment to moment, so it must be constantly monitoring itself in the light of changing conditions. It needs to avoid the "we've always done it that way" syndrome.

### *Days of unrest*

We are witnessing a major international breakdown in respect for law and order and legally constituted authority. There is much inflammable matter all around us, subject to being set ablaze by people who are governed by emotion and not by reason.

There is room in society for dissent and protest: indeed, it is by discontent leading to improvement that society progresses. But the dissent must be expressed under discipline so that it does not infringe the rights of other people. There is a minority that is aggressive, noisy, cruel and shocking. The fact that their antics still rate coverage in the newspapers is evidence that they are not yet socially acceptable.

James Truslow Adams, United States historian and social critic, wrote: "There is a group which will rock the boat as wildly as they can — the group for whom a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, and who love novelty and excitement, mistaking it for progress."

These people, wrecking their present and menacing their future with passionate zeal, offer a threat to what little security civilization has provided.

To deal with mindless violence requires action on two fronts by persons in authority: strong security measures to protect innocent people and compassionate examination of the trouble-makers to find the cause of their warped behaviour and return them to constructive living. These measures involve the whole community: schools, law-enforcement agencies, churches, parents and students.

It is a sad but inescapable fact that agitators who cause so great distress and damage in their attacks



upon society do not appreciate that it is society that gives them the opportunity both to dissent and to make the most of their talents. They accept all the benefits that Canada offers and yet contribute toward destruction of the institutions that are the bed-rock upon which our democratic society is built.

George Bernard Shaw, a man with an unorthodox turn of mind and great facility in expressing his thoughts pungently, wrote: "Anarchy is a state of things in which a man may do what he likes with his own — break your head with his own stick, for instance."

### *Something about rights*

All people are justified in seeking their rights, and persons in authority should uphold those rights, but not to the exclusion of what other people may want or need or have a right to. Crime and violence defile human dignity. Throwing bricks and stones and bottles of gasoline at those in authority is not a constitutional right, but evidence of sub-normal social development.

"Freedom" is a catchword widely used in speeches and on placards, but those who display it do not feel the strength of their own arguments. Personal freedom must have a legal basis. The true principle of democratic freedom is subordination to good law in a good State, with acceptance of mutual rights and obligations.

The lack of respect for authority is shown by people in crowds. They are often moved to action by demagogues, men and women with oratorical ability who gain popularity by arousing the emotions, passions and prejudices of those who listen to them. These agitators have nothing to commend them but the glow of their eloquence. They are masters in the art of casting an imitation fly convincingly to fish that are credulous enough to snap at it. They are people who merely pose as having authority.

A book was written in 1895 by Gustave Le Bon, a French doctor. It is a forecast of the forces that affect modern people in their addiction to world-wide social, political and racial confrontations. "It is possible," said Le Bon, "that the advent to power of the masses marks one of the last stages of Western civilization, a complete return to those periods of confused anarchy which seem always destined to precede the birth of every new society." Le Bon's book was republished in 1969 by Ballantine Books, New York. Its title is *The Crowd*.

An individual knows that alone he could not get away with setting fire to a building, overturning a car, or clubbing people who do not join him. In a crowd he is conscious of the power given him by numbers and of the anonymity which protects him from punishment. He enjoys the faceless irresponsibility of the mob. Under the spell of an ignorant or self-seeking leader he respects no rights under law and he has no compassion for victims of violence.

### *On gaining authority*

Everyone is entitled to aspire to gaining a position of authority, but there are some guidelines to follow. A Hindu proverb says: "There is nothing noble in feeling superior to some other person. The true nobility is in being superior to your previous self."

This may be rejected by "practical" people as counsel of perfection, but what other aiming point is there?

Those who have shown that they can lead their own lives effectively are best fitted to accept responsibility and authority. The true function of leadership is to bring out the best efforts of others, and people most willingly pay heed to those whom they consider most able to direct.

One who hopes to lead must show respect for the group with which he works. A person in authority will be able to direct orderly and well-disposed men and women: he must also be capable of inspiring ordinary people with respect for him and his position and enthusiasm for the work he directs. Even the most statesmanlike measures imposed by authority are incapable of improving a community unless a desire for improvement and will to carry this desire into voluntary action under a trusted leader are awakened in the hearts of the people concerned.

Today's evils have been with us in some form since the dawn of civilization, but today we have the knowledge and ability to rebuild things.

### *Envy causes opposition*

This makes so much good sense that we are prompted to ask: "Why, then, are so many people antagonistic to individuals in authority?"

Aristides, a celebrated Athenian general and statesman whose great temperance and virtue procured him the surname of *The Just*, provides an example. Herodotus, the "father of history", wrote of Aristides: "Having heard of his manner of life I consider him to have been the best and most upright man in Athens." But Aristides was accused of crimes against the state, and banishment was proposed. The fate of persons so accused was decided by popular vote. A man approached Aristides, whom he did not recognize, with the request that Aristides mark his ballot, since he himself could not write. Aristides, writing his name on the ballot, asked him: "Has Aristides injured you in any way, or why do you wish to banish him?" The man replied that no injury had been done, "but it vexes me to hear him everywhere called 'The Just'."

A person in authority is not necessarily a saint, an artist, a philosopher or a hero, but he respects truth, appreciates what is beautiful, knows how to behave himself, and is courageous in meeting his obligations.

He will have intellectual curiosity and will be always learning. He is tolerant, liberal and unshockable. If he is not always affable and urbane, he at least is never truculent or overbearing. He will be a cultured, broadminded scholar who lives according to the spirit of reasonableness.