

LOVELY LAW OF THE JUNGLE

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"INDUSTRY as such does not exist. What exists are myriads of companies and people. Government has the job—which this government has totally failed to

do—of creating conditions—a climate—in which these myriads of companies and people, driven spontaneously by their own interests and within a framework of law, do what is in the national interest. For these purposes government must get the general pressures and incentives right."

Good stuff this. It's part of a speech by Tory M.P. Sir Keith Joseph. Of course it's a political speech—but it still makes sense.

I'm not a Tory myself; I'm a floating voter—scanning the horizon for a worthy ship. But I can imagine the socialist reply to Sir Keith. It would be full of such phrases as "law of the jungle," "dog eat dog," "capitalist chaos," "free-for-all," etc.

It's hard work breaking through this mania for planning, but substitute the word "traffic" for "industry" in the speech above and we get a good picture of the rush hour scene on our city roads. Now let's try a little socialist planning. For a start we can't have everyone rushing into the street and jumping into their cars just when they fancy it. We are going to have order. First of all, every motorist and transport passenger would have to fill in a form stating where he was going, where he was starting from, and at what time. These forms would have to be completed for each day's travel as people's plans might change. This information would be collated by a central body and processed together with other information such as the frequency of change of the traffic lights at all intersections, so that progress would be orderly (like the orderly marketing of potatoes which brings us surpluses and shortages). The weather man would be brought in, and with the aid of a computer due allowance would be made for rain, fog, sleet and snow. The AA and the RAC would be told that there would be no breakdowns because they would no longer be allowed. Statisticians would work out average vehicle speeds and capacities over the various routes. Allowances would be made for learner drivers, fool-hardy pedestrians and women drivers.

Each day car owners and public transport drivers would be issued with their travel schedule. There would be no appeal. Soon we would have our streets all sweetness and light—or would we?

Of course we need traffic regulations; of course we need to keep to one side of the road, to follow certain one-way streets and obey traffic lights, but this does not interfere with motorists following their legitimate interests; on the contrary it helps them. This is the "framework of law" that Sir Keith recognises in his speech.

Having laid this down for industry on the basis of a fair field and no favour, (we haven't much of this yet), the government should step out of the road.