

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING

Big Business, Big Labour and Big Brother

Gerald F. Sorrensen, Associate Professor of Economics at California State University, Los Angeles, in the *Christian Science Monitor*.

NOT MANY decades ago, Britons could literally boast that the sun never set on the British Empire. Now, of course, the sun has set on that empire in a figurative sense. And today, the very heart of that vanished empire, Great Britain itself, is entering a twilight period of economic gloom. Likewise, and for similar reasons, the United States has been moving into a shadowy economic condition, led by a succession of governments headed by both political parties, which have allowed special interest groups of great power to divert to their own benefit the energy output of the economic dynamo.

We refer to the gradual institutionalisation and legalisation of groups with market power so immense that they can bring economic loss and suffering to tens of millions of innocent victims. Specifically, we refer to Big Business, Big Labour and Big Professional Associations - those institutions which give lip service to free enterprise capitalism, and yet use every tactic they can, both fair and unfair, to distort it in their favour and therefore - effectively - to undermine it. The heart of capitalism is free, informed, and open competition, with complete equality of opportunity. All too often the thrust of big institutions is restricted entry, control, monopoly and misinformation - the antithesis of the conditions which make free enterprise capitalism possible.

Consider the case against Big Labour.

Last spring Great Britain was forced to close down many of its industrial plants, a million or so became unemployed, a great many more were reduced to part time, and the common man everywhere was asked to accept cold and hardship in order that some 280,000 miners (out of 20 million workers) might gain what they considered just. Or consider the strike by some 42,000 British longshoremen in late July and early August. Stocks of fresh fruits and vegetables were depleted, thousands of tons of rotten food were dumped, tomato growers in Guernsey suffered irreparable losses, and growers and shippers from several continents were pushed toward bankruptcy.

In neither of these strikes were the ethical issues clear cut. Justice was certainly involved, though. In the case of the coal strike, the very fact that the miners at one time ranked among the best paid blue collar

workers, and that they had fallen to sixteenth, said something - especially when one notes that no occupation is dirtier, more dangerous, or more likely to lead to an early death than that of coal mining.

But this is not our prime concern. It is rather the political process which permits such injustice to be imposed upon millions of innocent people because the big strike has become the accepted pathway to settlement.

At what point does the disrespect for a political process which favours the strong over the weak reach such proportions that we are in trouble? It is a slow, insidious change, admittedly, but eventually this catering to groups with immense market power will completely undermine the credibility of government, as well as respect for law and order. Already the teachers who above all ought to teach respect for law and order, have been pushed into repeated illegal strikes. The warnings from Great Britain and, for that matter, from the United States as well, are ominous. There is need to curtail immense market power, whatever its form, before the injustices it promotes lead to radical and undemocratic solutions which do no one any good.

Policy Makers or Puppets ?

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WHERE ARE power and its camp-follower, influence, to be found in modern government? Do they reside almost exclusively in the Cabinet, served by a self-effacing and politically neutral Civil Service, and occasionally attentive to the demands of its Parliamentary supporters? Or is this a constitutional charade, disguising the modern political realities of Prime Ministerial dominance and a Civil Service mandarin-ate, equipped with its own distinctive outlook and favoured policies?

Such questions gain point when a Government reverses its policies. Mr. Heath's administration, having come to power armed with very radical economic and industrial proposals, has steadily retreated into the temporary haven offered by consensus politics.

But a Government's policies are based on more solid foundation than Prime Ministerial whims. They are based on the whims of senior civil servants. Who are the influential mandarins? It would be only a mild exaggeration to claim that the prices and incomes package was devised by three men, Sir William Armstrong, Sir Frank Figgures and Sir Douglas Allen.

It seems clear that influential bureaucrats were pre-