

# Chapter 3

## POLITICAL ABERRATIONS

### Nation states; clinging to 'sovereignty'

One of the more retrograde traditions hampering man's progress is the concept that it is normal for the world to be divided up into such an astonishing variety of independent sovereign states, which may, customarily, make war on each other to settle their disputes. In such states, citizens' natural affinities to their local cultural/economic regions are compromised by chauvinistic seduction to the 'centre' however distant it may be. As Guy de Maupassant said: 'Patriotism is the egg from which wars are hatched'. Leaders of nation states thrive on confrontations as a means of uniting many of their peoples, and distracting attention from their endemic domestic problems; witness Margaret Thatcher's flamboyant excursion to the Falklands/Malvinas, and President Bush's evident loss of direction following termination of both the Cold War and the Gulf conflict.

When asked what they used to call North America before the Europeans arrived, a Native American replied 'Ours'. Overseas empires came and went, in name at least. But, over recent centuries, local groups of populations world-wide have been dragged together into vast, unwieldy conglomerates by domineering elements, ambitious for ever more power. In Africa, some 80 different ethnic and language groups were coerced into the 45m strong Ethiopia; Lincoln welded together the independent US states, whilst Bismarck did likewise with the German provinces, and there are all too many other examples.

The most obvious, dramatic feature of the world's nation states is the bizarre variation in their sizes by population, comprising approximately, 30 with less than 1m, 120 varying from 1m to 10m, and 50 varying wildly from 10m up to the billion level. By contrast, within states, efforts are usually made to sub-divide populations into roughly equal groupings for administrative purposes. Faced with the task of setting up any organisation, can it be imagined that anyone would create a hotch-potch of departments with some being 10, 100 or even 1000 times larger than others? Little wonder that the UN, set up with such high ideals after World War Two, should have become, all but inevitably, the 'Disunited Nations'. For the UN regulation, allowing the Security Council to override all other countries, makes a mockery of its own rule of 'sovereign equality of all members'.

In some instances, not even the full Security Council, but two or three of its most powerful members, have usurped the moral authority of the UN to cloak their own particular bellicose activities. Regrettably also, by underpinning the concept of the sanctity of national sovereignty, the UN has actually done a great disservice to many unfortunate millions, by condoning 'non-interventions', when interventions could have prevented, or alleviated, tragic cases of famine and genocide.

### Separatist movements

Evidence of the widespread resentment of localised cultural groups against their forcible inclusion within nation states is demonstrated by the many separatist movements across every continent. These vary from armed reactions opposing brutal repression, to peaceful pressures for various forms of regional autonomy. 1991/92 saw the onset of the breaking up of both the USSR and Yugoslavia, and the re-emergence of some of their original constituent republics. Several of these themselves however, still contain significant would-be-independent groupings. *In spite of the legitimate and understand-*

*able pressures for independence by so many minorities, the world has yet to witness any nation state agreeing willingly to subdivision - their leaderships are invariably too concerned with maintaining their own dominance.*

Since world leadership is in the hands of the major nations, whose leaders are allergic to changes which might diminish their own powers, a noticeable bias against separatist movements exists world-wide. This is exemplified by the following February 1991 report:

The US is anxious to avoid the disintegration of Iraq, which is extremely difficult to govern at the best of times because of its disparate ethnic groups. There are many forces...Muslims, Communists, Nasserites and Kurds...but none is able to control the country by itself. The Kurds constitute about one quarter of the country's population...but they are not Arabs and could hardly lead the rest of Iraq.<sup>1</sup>

But why should they, and why should all the others be 'led' by them anyway ? It is hardly surprising that the state of Iraq is 'difficult to govern' in view of its having been a totally artificial creation by the British, as recently as 1921, with scant regard for the aspirations of the various groups of tribesmen involved. Those aspirations, as of millions of others world-wide, for full regional, cultural independence remain submerged beneath the bolstering by the great powers of that particularly brutal example of national sovereignty.

### Increasing erosion of frontiers

Many world citizens undoubtedly accept the existence of sovereign states simply through having grown up with them and known nothing else. In fact, as with other forms of organisation rooted only in tradition, they are totally inappropriate in today's world. John McHale comments:

The nation state today is, at best, a laggard partner in the global community, often contributing more to the disorder than the control of world events, through clinging to its illusions of earlier physical and sovereign autonomy. In effect, though we continue to talk and act as though it were indeed possible, no single nation today, however large and powerful, can 'go it alone'. If all access to transnationally sustained networks such as postal services, telecommunications, airlines, world weather and health information and the like, were cut off, no developed nation could survive more than a few days.<sup>2</sup>

That nation states are anachronisms is illustrated by the ways frontiers are both breached conveniently in some circumstances, and act as irritating obstacles in others. For example, states do not hesitate to discharge toxic products into the atmosphere for dispersal over the territories of their neighbours. Businessmen do not hesitate to transmit their funds across frontiers to wherever they sense opportunities for maximum returns; there are over 600 Japanese companies in Southern California alone and UK investment in the US totals \$120bn. In a unilateral decision on 3/11/89, the US Justice Department did not hesitate to decree that members of either US Forces or the FBI have the 'legal right' to arrest any drug dealer, in any country, without the consent of that country. When this astonishing ruling, to give US agents the 'right' to kidnap and forcibly abduct foreign nationals from their own countries for trial in the US, was challenged in the Supreme Court, it was endorsed by a majority of 6 to 3. The ruling so exasperated Mexico that it withdrew its co-operation with the US against drug-trafficking.

The *Guardian* report (17/6/92) continued: 'Other countries are also expected to refuse to accept what amounts to a US declaration of legal supremacy over other national jurisdictions'.

Even nations themselves, at times, attempt to rationalise their separate identities by diminishing, but not eliminating, frontiers, as exemplified by the protagonists of the

European Economic Community. A glaring example of the innumerable obstacles created by state frontiers is provided by the chaos resulting from national airspace boundaries, threatening to strangle the international air transport network. An August 1991 report states:

There are 31 different air traffic control systems in operation in Europe, using computers from 18 manufacturers with 22 independent program languages, using different designs and methodologies, leading to further incompatibilities, resulting in half having significant deficiencies and 24 percent having major deficiencies. National sovereignties are preventing the extension of radar boundaries, and there are fears that national pride will prevent governments using technology readily available in the US;...politicians view the creation of a co-ordinated European aviation authority as a threat to national sovereignty!<sup>3</sup>

The ill-effects of nation states impinge chiefly on their ordinary citizens, who have to put up with the many resulting restrictions on their lives, including trading and exchange problems, inhibitions on travelling, and varying degrees of political repression, together with the obligation to pay taxes to maintain unnecessary armed forces. *The financial elites however, are able to adopt a more pragmatic approach to national sovereignty - they ride roughshod over it when it suits them, but expect support of all kinds, even armed, from 'their' country, if required, to protect or further their interests.* That the really powerful in the world have scant regard for nation states today is illustrated by the following quotation from George Ball, former US Secretary of State and chairman of Lehmann Brothers International. 'Working through great corporations that straddle the earth, men are able for the first time to utilise world resources with an efficiency dictated by the objective logic of profit. By contrast, the nation state is a very old-fashioned idea and badly adapted to our present complex world.'<sup>4</sup>

### 'Parliamentary democracies' - executive control

The great majority of First World countries pride themselves on being parliamentary democracies. In Third World countries, where any forms of popular representation exist, they too, usually adopt the same approach; for example, former members of the British Empire tend to favour the 'Westminster model'.

Parliaments relate to nation states and these are, in the great majority of cases, far too large to be amenable to truly democratic governance. A serious flaw in the theory of parliamentary democracy - widely recognised but rarely questioned - is that in virtually all cases real power is wielded by executives, not parliaments, resulting in whole populations of very many millions of highly educated and articulate citizens being controlled by a handful of cabinet members. This scenario naturally suits top elites admirably, for the simple reason that it is easier to influence six people than six hundred. Judging by the prominence regularly accorded to Presidents or Premiers of most nations, whether medium or vast in size, as though they truly reflected all their citizens' aspirations, it can be assumed that the plague of executive control is widespread.

A report on *Civil Liberties in Modern Britain* by Ewing and Gearty (Oxford University Press, May 1990), asserts that, despite the rhetoric of Liberalism, there has never been a true democratic culture in Britain. They point to executive (ie Prime Minister's) proposals quickly becoming law via a quiescent Parliament, without sufficient scrutiny or debate and without the possibility of subsequent challenge.<sup>5</sup> Speaking in the House of Commons on 17/5/91 Tony Benn MP said: 'We are always boasting that we are the mother of parliaments and that the whole world envies our system of government. But the truth is that, under the cover of a mass of ritual and tradition, this House has become a shell, concealing its political impotence against the executive under a cloak of panoply, and has surrendered, one by one, rights which earlier generations wrested so painfully from the authorities of their day.'

That the 'Westminster model' parliament represents a hollow form of democracy is illustrated by an excerpt from the memoirs of Fernando Moran, Spain's Foreign Minister from 1982-85. During an interview regarding Gibraltar with Mrs Thatcher, Senor Moran's attempt to introduce other British views on the sovereignty of the Rock came to an abrupt halt when Mrs Thatcher suddenly roared: 'They can say what they like in the House of Commons. It's not in the Commons but here [at Number Ten] that foreign policy is made.' After protests from Senor Moran there followed a pause, after which Mrs Thatcher said: 'Very well, let's make a deal. You forget everything I've said and I'll forget everything you said.'<sup>6</sup>

To guard him or her against serious disagreement either close at hand or countrywide, a British premier has exclusive control over the secret intelligence service MI5, with 2,300 staff and a £300m pa budget, which may not even be discussed by Parliament. A UK premier also has the support of powerful statistical and publicity departments which have become adept at 'cooking the books', so as to present figures which maximise the achievements of the executive. For example, in the late 1980s, of some 25 alterations in the presentation of statistics of unemployment, 24 showed it to be falling; of 380 vaunted new hospital projects, 80 were not due to start for 3 years and the total was further inflated by devices such as including nine separate subcontracts for the same hospital; the boasted new 17,000 odd hospital beds ignored the loss of some 20,000 already; and so on.

The domination of parliaments by executives is clearly 'not in the public interest', but even if executive powers were curtailed, twentieth century experiences world-wide have shown that parliamentary systems cannot provide genuinely popular democracies in their present contexts. A 1991 poll showed two-thirds of UK citizens dissatisfied with their political system; in the US, at least half the population is totally unconcerned with electoral politics; never voting, and ignorant even of the names of prominent politicians or the party in power. In his memoirs, ex-President Carter says: 'Knowing how confused and fragmented the system is, how intense the forces are that tend to induce ill-advised decisions, and how fallible are the leaders that serve in public office, it is almost a miracle how well our nation survives.'

A further flaw in the theory of parliamentary democracy lies in the continual emphasis placed on the 'multi-party' characteristic. The mass media portrays single-party states as, by definition, non-democratic; whereas states having two or more political parties are held automatically to be democratic. This applies even where the differences between the policies of the parties concerned are all but impossible to detect. For example, the US, self-styled leader of the 'free world' has never had a political party even pretending to represent the interests of the mass of working people, and both the Democrats and Republicans stand unashamedly for the interests of the moneyed establishment. In the UK, the loyalties of so many voters to 'their' party, regardless of policies, means that elections are largely a formality in many constituencies which are 'safe' for one party or the other, leaving real contests only in the 'marginals'.

The issue of voting systems, at the occasional elections held within parliamentary democracies when any citizen-input is involved, has been the subject of endless debate over decades. All conceivable systems from 'first past the post' to the many variations of proportional representation have been tried out in nations world-wide, but none has ever been claimed to be totally satisfactory and popular.

Even if dominating executives did not exist and parliaments were completely their own masters, and the perfect electoral voting system were to be devised, parliamentary democracy would still not represent real democracy, because the ratio of around 100,000 citizens to one parliamentarian is clearly absurd. *With very few exceptions, all modern states are vastly too large for existing forms of parliamentary representation*

*to be democratically meaningful.* At the close of the twentieth century, the bitter proof of the failures of parliamentary democracy is the widespread rise of extreme right, even fascist movements - the very outcome which, from 1939 to 1945, countless millions died to prevent happening again.

## Politicians

When asked for the cause of his relative failure as a politician, Lord Rosebery replied that he had gone into politics as a 'chivalrous adventure', and instead found himself in 'an evil-smelling bog'<sup>7</sup>, which few will find surprising. However, the nub of his reply was that he 'had gone into politics', just as he might have chosen to go into banking or a hundred and one other careers. This underlines another fatal flaw in current world 'order', namely that, instead of being recognised as unique in that it involves the clearly impossible task of properly representing every aspiration of 100,000 fellow citizens, a career in politics is ranked no differently from any other. This serious anomaly is well illustrated by a 'Job Suggestions' leaflet issued by a UK county education service.<sup>8</sup> In this list of some 400 possible careers to choose from, barely credibly, 'Politician' appears between Public Relations Assistant and Air Steward/Stewardess!

*Developments world-wide in recent years have strengthened the belief that the one job that should not be a job at all is being a politician.* As nearly as possible, every citizen should be involved in democratic politics, which affect every minute of their lives; putting an X against the name of a total stranger every five years is a travesty. Treating politics as a job has, in most cases, had the predictable outcome that a politician's priority - as of any employee - becomes not only to retain the job but also to exploit whatever potential it may hold for his/her advancement. The urge to maximise popularity, particularly with constituents, results in politicians supporting 'quick fixes' rather than more carefully planned longer term solutions. For instance, to generate short-term employment locally, they may support developments which are potentially damaging to the environment.

Referring to two front-runners in the 1992 US presidential election campaign, Andrew Wilson said 'both are creatures of the political system that dictates they will say and do what they need in order to get elected.'<sup>9</sup> This indeed was borne out by President Bush himself in a TV interview: 'I am certainly going into this as a dog-eat-dog fight and I will do what I have to do to get elected.'<sup>10</sup> This is echoed by Bill Moyers, once Lyndon Johnson's press secretary. Describing Bush as 'the most deeply unprincipled man in American politics today' he went on to say 'I have watched him for almost 30 years and have never known him to take a stand except for political expediency.'<sup>11</sup>

It is perhaps in character that Bush chose Dan Quayle as his Vice-President, a man whose gaffes were so frequent and profound that a publication was founded just to record them all, known as the 'Quayle Quarterly'. Returning from a tour of Latin America, Quayle told a Congresswoman 'the only regret I had was that I didn't study Latin harder in school so I could converse with these people'.

World-wide, the care-free attitudes of 'parliamentary democracies' towards their politicians' activities is best exemplified by the financial rewards collected by the less scrupulous, normally right of centre MPs. In the UK parliament, out of 650 MPs, nearly 400 have commercial interests, either as consultants or directors, with average fees of £8,000 pa, so that with three extra 'jobs', their parliamentary salary can well be doubled. MPs' activities, promoted by the nefarious and growing lobbying 'industry' (see Chapter 2) are of course designed to benefit whoever sponsors them, certainly not the MP's constituents. Yet MPs were requested but not required to disclose to anyone what they 'earn' for promoting various interests and causes; if any embarrassing allegations were ever made, they were only investigated by fellow MPs. Little wonder that

so many debates in the UK House of Commons take place before virtually empty benches.

Because of the constant ferment of financial wheeler-dealings amongst leading parliamentarians, corruption scandals keep emerging with monotonous regularity. In Toronto in September 1991, 13 prominent politicians were charged in court with everything from obstructing justice to taking bribes and peddling influence. They included one Minister, three former Ministers and a former provincial governor, all close colleagues of the Canadian premier.<sup>12</sup> Japanese politics are particularly expensive, involving daily gifts by MPs to retain their constituents' support of around £50 at hospital visits, £100 at weddings and £150 at funerals. A Tokyo bribery case listed payments ranging from £3m to £49m to some 200 politicians, and at times it has been customary for established MPs to 'buy' a cabinet post for around £100,000 in cash.<sup>13</sup>

A group of rich business people wished, in 1945, to replace the sitting pro-Roosevelt Californian congressman with someone more to their liking, so they advertised: 'Wanted: Congressman candidate with no previous experience.' An unknown young lawyer called Richard Nixon applied, and, after a ten-minute interview, was chosen; whereupon the group's whole resources were thrown behind him. A year later he entered Congress and subsequently, with the same backing, costing over \$60m, became President. Hundred of clandestine, illegal donations were made, some in expectation of future favours; a suitcase stuffed with \$100 notes appeared to be a standard contribution.

The same elite business group subsequently sponsored Reagan's climb to the White House, using a different routing via the Californian Governorship, but the same promotional techniques. After his election, with astonishing disregard for that sponsorship, Reagan said: 'I'm not quite able to explain why I'm here, apart from believing it's part of God's plan for me'.

Reagan's philosophy was 'what I want to see above all else is that this country remains a country where someone can always get rich; that's the thing we have and that's the thing that must be preserved'. Of the 13 members of his cabinet, 8 were millionaires and 3 all-but millionaires. During the 1980s, 55 senior officials appointed by Reagan either resigned in disgrace, or were caught in corrupt dealings involving millions of dollars.

Little wonder that an opinion poll in the US revealed that only used-car salesmen are mistrusted more than politicians.

A senior US congressman spends 3 to 4 hours of each day fundraising for his election campaigns; if he does not raise thousands of dollars daily he is doing badly.<sup>14</sup> A former assistant to two US senators points out that 'any member of Congress who says donations don't influence him is lying; all of them are corrupt. The only question is the degree of corruption. Campaign money has to influence even the most incorruptible because people don't give away money for nothing.'<sup>15</sup>

Expenditure on propelling candidates into 31 Senate and 435 Congress seats in the US in November 1990 was \$777m. Shortly after collecting \$10m for his re-election fund, in May 1992, four of President Bush's leading donors and fund raisers were indicted by the federal regulatory authorities for their roles in failed Savings and Loans institutions which cost US tax-payers over \$3bn. Total electoral expenses in the US were expected to exceed \$1bn.<sup>16</sup>

That politicians and even presidents are too often only puppets of their wealthy elites is borne out forcefully by the wealthy US citizen, Frederick Townsend Martin, quoted in Labor's Untold Story (Boyer and Morais, New York, 1970), who said :

It matters not one iota what political party is in power or what President holds the reins

of office. We are not politicians or public thinkers; we are the rich; we own America; we got it, God knows how, but we intend to keep it if we can by throwing all the tremendous weight of our support, our influence, our money, our political connections, our purchased senators, our hungry congressmen, our public-speaking demagogues, into the scales against any legislature, any political platform, any presidential campaign that threatens the integrity of our state... The class I represent cares nothing for politics. In a single season a plutocratic leader hurled his influence and his money into the scale to elect a Republican governor on the Pacific coast and a Democratic candidate on the Atlantic coast.

## Political parties

Within each 'parliamentary democracy' the existence of several political parties has become the norm; in the March 1992 elections in Thailand for example, 15 parties were vying for seats. The attraction of the possibility of power evidently outweighs the obvious difficulty of thinking up so many distinctly different policies for solving a country's problems.

To the very small extent that parliamentary representation is meaningful at all, political parties have in fact become barriers between people and parliaments, because of the virtual impossibility of a citizen representing his or her fellows unless sponsored by a party. In effect, two-tier representation results. First, each party elects its leaders by more or less fair means. They then hold conferences of such supporters as are elected and/or able to attend, who, by majority votes, create party policies. At times however, party leaders take it upon themselves to renege on these democratically arrived at policies. For example, for several successive years from 1989, the UK Labour Party Conference voted, by large majorities, for Britain's military spending to be reduced to the average level of other West European countries, and to allot the resulting £7bn pa saving to housing, health and education. However, in spite of the party's own constitution stating that two-to-one majority conference decisions must automatically become Labour policy, the leadership consistently refused to implement it.

Political parties adopt parliamentary candidates, acceptable to the leaders, who, if elected, may well remain MPs for a considerable time. Thus the average voter's chances of having his views even considered in Parliament for translation into law are problematical to say the least, depending on whether those views are in tune with the party's, with its leader's, with the MPs, and whether his favoured party wins power anyway. And that in turn, depends, to varying extents, on the financial support given. If his party's policy runs counter to the elite's, that support is likely to be severely restricted. If on the other hand, he supports the status quo, his chosen party can fare very well indeed. For instance, prior to the 1987 UK election, 333 companies paid over £4.5m into Conservative Party funds, which subsequently benefited further by £2m from a Greek shipping magnate, by £440,000 from a business man awaiting trial for theft and fraud, and by large sums from Hong Kong and Middle Eastern elites.

1 *Guardian* 27/2/91

2 *World Facts and Trends*, J McHale, Macmillan, New York 1972

3 *Guardian* 3/8/91

4 *The Race for Riches*, J Seabrook, Marshall Pickering 1988

5 *Guardian* 10/5/90

6 Ditto 25/10/90

7 *Observer* 18/11/90

8 Leaflet AC6 Shropshire Education Careers Service, Dec 1988

9 *Observer* 26/1/92

10 *Guardian* 6/1/92

11 *Observer* 8/9/91

12 Ditto 15/9/91

- 13 Ditto 26/1/92
- 14 Ditto 25/3/90
- 15 New Internationalist, July 1984
- 16 *Guardian* 14/5/92