

## WHERE IS THE POWER?

It is high time to draw up a map of power.

No experience is more direct, more immediate than that of power. No term gives rise to more confusion, willingly or unwillingly.

Everyone dreams of it, and when he believes he holds a part of it, he then strives to make people forget it. We can assume that the only true criterion of power would be the assertion of the power-wielder that he has nothing in his pockets, nothing in his hands. And yet we speak of the intoxication of power. But is this the same kind of power?

To have power means to make oneself be obeyed, or rather to have the ability to make others obey. The fact of obedience is tied to this mysterious gift, which is called the sense of command, authority. Finally, to have power means to know how to make believe that one has it.

One can hold power without making oneself be obeyed, and make oneself be obeyed without wielding power.

At this stage occult powers are evoked. Even when it is a question of hidden powers, the distinction between power and

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## *Where is the Power?*

authority remains valid. A particular big boss, a particular trade-union leader, a particular newspaper publisher are listened to. Others, disposing of more money, more adherents, more readers are without influence. We must resign ourselves to accept our part in this anomaly, in the century of cybernetics—man exists, an aberrant factor which cannot be eliminated. Personalities are not interchangeable. In the army one cannot command with one's rank. In the stock exchange, one cannot command with one's shares.

Calling cards bearing many titles are reassuring. It indicates the search for esteem, and hence an inherent weakness. On the other hand, it is well to beware of people of simple, almost shabby manner, who are not embarrassed by convention and show little respect for social taboos. If they have an idea and hold closely to it, they will be found again soon, invisible spiders in the center of a skillfully spun web.

These remarks are valid for all periods and all countries.

What is specific to our time? The most diverse and even contradictory opinions confront each other. Some affirm that power is becoming personalized; others that it is being fragmented. The former refer to the myths; the latter, to the structures.

They all agree on the predication that power is affected by the sudden and profound changes which characterize the evolution of modern society. We conclude from this that power must be renovated, modernized. Renewed republic or modern democracy, the choice is not really a choice. The presentation itself proves that a postulate exists: power must accomplish its own change. Finally, the political apparatus is deemed to be anachronistic and should be adapted to the actual state of our scientific and technical society.

Hence the temptation in almost all countries to reform the institutions. Is this the problem?

In the first place, in our day, where is the power? It is at the same time very dispersed and very concentrated.

Very dispersed, due to the fact that the means of communication and expression dilute what formerly was kept safe from the vulgar herd.

Very concentrated, because these same means permit and,

in certain measure, impose quick decision, near simultaneity between conception and execution.

So far as the academic discussions on the origin and legitimacy of power are concerned, they are primarily of historical interest.<sup>1</sup>

Everyone agrees on the right of universal suffrage. But this unanimity conceals and reveals a deep scepticism. The expression of the will of the people through the ballot appears as a lesser evil, as a convenient subterfuge which does away with insoluble problems, such as are confronted in the arena of rival oligarchies.

Once the people has made its choice, whether it be a direct election of a leader or of members of Parliament, theoretically the power is in the hands of a small group of men: the cabinet ministers, the government. As Rivarol wrote: "The people is the force, the government is the organ and their union constitutes political power." No nation is known that could manage its affairs without a government. The system of representative assemblies alone has most likely never existed. What came closest to it was doubtless Athens. But the example of Pericles shows that, in such a system, a man can permanently impose his will even by submitting to the risky formality of yearly reelection.

In brief, the only choice is monarchy or oligarchy.

The case for monarchy is relatively simple. It depends on the psychology of great men and the study of the mythology of heroes. The case for oligarchy, commonly called democracy, is much more complicated and will alone be examined here.

Naturally, between monarchy and oligarchy there are intermediate stages. Stalin was a monarch. Krushchev, without doubt, is no longer one. He is not, however, for all this simply the chief of an oligarchy.

Within the oligarchic system, whether the government is truly collegial or, on the contrary, subjected to its chief is of the greatest importance. A decision presented for approval to a cabinet does not have the same coloration as a measure born out of a compromise between contradictory positions. The power of shock is different. An experienced observer can almost

<sup>1</sup> In this sense, the great book by Bertrand de Jouvenel, *Du pouvoir* (Geneva, Bourquin, 1947) is a remarkable synthesis.

*Where is the Power?*

distinguish, from the published communiques of cabinet sessions, between the measures taken by the chief and those left to the arbitration of the cabinet.

The essential point is to know whether the cabinet reflects divergent forces; opposed tendencies within the majority party or the government coalition, conflicts between different administrations, between administrations and economic powers, between the various sectors of the economy.

The chief of government, naturally, must overcome these tensions, but in this way he also has an opportunity to test his ideas, to measure the resistances, to localize the dangers.

If the composition of the cabinet is too uniform, the chief then surrounds himself with other advisors. Alongside the official cabinet, he has recourse to a private, secret cabinet, whose composition varies according to the times and the problems.

In any case, the center of sole decision is the chief of the government (whether or not he is at the same time the chief of state). Even if he is incapable and characterless, the chief of government constitutes this center. No one can substitute himself for him. It is also a decision to decide nothing.

To govern is to decide. But the taking of a decision is the result of a whole series of operations of unequal weight and none of which is negligible.

First of all the formulation of the problem is of utmost importance. The definition of the problem contains the germs of the solution or solutions. From the start, the possibilities are thus eliminated which are not given their chance.

This is all the more true, since, for the convenience of the formulation, one always tends to reconstruct a situation as a dilemma. Who then poses the limits of the alternative? The one or those who are said to keep the files, that is to say, the officials.

To affirm that actual power is in the hands of the officials is a truism. It is expedient to stress it strongly.

First of all it must be determined on what level the officials are powerful. Here great difficulties begin. It would be too summary to attribute influence to the highest of the high officials; simply by taking the hierarchy into account. Surely, the chiefs of administration have the privilege of being in direct contact with the ministers. But frequently (and this is mostly the case

when it comes to the military), the effort required for the prudent conduct of a long career has used up the incumbent in the function. Before the minister he will proclaim the dangers, enumerate objections, gain time, and retreat in the face of risks. The vacillating attitude of Generals Maurin and Gamelin, during the remilitarization of the left bank of the Rhine in March 1936, should not be forgotten, an historical circumstance in which the fate of Hitler and of the world was without doubt at stake. In order to be relieved of the technical responsibility of a limited operation, these timid leaders advanced the necessity of a general mobilization. They surmised that the politicians would falter, on the eve of general elections, before such a measure. Naturally, the testimonies on the direct action taken by such and such an official are difficult to gather. "Memoires" are the only source. They are clearly contradictory, but they make cross-checks possible.

Here, as elsewhere, and possibly more than elsewhere, everything comes back to the question of men. If an authoritarian temperament happens to be associated with an important function, the result is excitable, sometimes even explosive. This is not most frequently the case. And, if it occurs, it is not lasting. President Truman and General MacArthur could not coexist.

The chiefs of administration, when they lack the inner strength to face battles alone, must lean on their collaborators. These, removed from the limelight, hence less exposed to the caprices of politicians, thrive on inspiring their immediate chiefs and experience a gratification that is not always sullen in finding the trace, often deformed, of their own ideas in cabinet speeches and decisions.

On the other hand, directors or deputy directors of ministries are subject in their turn to the influence of their subordinates: division chiefs, bureau chiefs. A director of an important ministry, loaded down with interviews, receptions, and telephone calls, is happy to entrust the study of a very important file to a modest, efficient and trustworthy collaborator. If the latter takes a keen interest in his work and reaches precise conclusions, these have every chance of going up the line, all the way to cabinet level. Undoubtedly, along the way, they will be softened (the contrary is never to be feared), but something will hold good from them,

## *Where is the Power?*

and above all the essential thing: the way in which the question was posed.

This is quite clear when the size of budgetary credits has to be reckoned. Frequently a young editor in the budget administration is at the origin of basic options. He proposes certain cuts, suggests certain compensations, the consequences of which will be felt only later and will sometimes be decisive. It is here, too, where the real role of Parliament intervenes and in particular its most important arm, the Finance Committee. The mission of every Parliament is to vote on taxes. The amendments proposed by the members of Parliament (whose competence in this matter is unquestionable, inasmuch as they very frequently have local administrative responsibilities), collide with the officials of the Finance Ministry, who, seated in the second row, behind the bench reserved for cabinet ministers, exhort the ministers not to give in. To use the polemic language of the two camps, the "technocrats" and "demagogues" try, the former by whispers, the latter through oratorical artifice, to sway the decision of the nominal holder of the power: the Minister. Without exaggerating the role of these officials, it is fitting to examine their motivations.

How they were formed is paramount. It varies according to country and also according to government departments. In fact, in all countries, an implicit distinction exists between the first- and second-ranking government departments. One can, it seems, class the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Finance in the top category. To go further would doubtlessly be imprudent and arbitrary.

Nevertheless a statement of fact may be deduced from this: the relatively important weight exercised by lower-echelon officials belonging to these privileged administrations.

Their social origins and their studies place them in the middle-class milieu. Generally, they have a high awareness of the general interest and of the loftiness of their mission, a clear aversion to the power of money, which they accuse of corrupting some of their chiefs; finally, they are highly suspicious of politicians, whom they consider ready to sacrifice the traditional positions of government administration to parliamentary contingencies or electoral calculations. All this makes for men who

are somewhat aloof, closed-in and somber, and it explains the confusion which is felt by expeditious businessmen or brash journalists when facing them. The latter know by experience that it does no good to treat them brusquely, and even worse, to by-pass them. The mildest official, if he receives an order from outside on the subject of an affair on which he holds the file, becomes an enraged sheep. This reminder of his subordinate position humiliates him. He takes vengeance on the clumsy person who made the inopportune intervention. On the other hand, the clever ones know how to gain the favor of the unknown bureaucrat placed at the bottleneck, at the point they must pass.

One category of privileged officials must be set apart: the high officials detached to the cabinet ministries. Frequently coming from the top social strata (with various titles they may be found in all countries where the public service has reached a certain level), these men straddle Parliament and the administration.

With a double piano keyboard at their disposal they can warn the parliamentarians against taking up positions dictated by the opportunity of the moment and infuse some of the enthusiasm into the services that animates the political leaders worthy of this name. Benefiting at the same time from both the trust of the minister who has called on them to assist him, and a special statute, which guarantees their material independence, they can permit themselves the boldness that lack of worry about the future allows. They are even in a more favorable position than their boss, who is a target of parliamentary and press attacks. Protected by his shadow, they act without having to account to anyone. In periods of grave crisis, when the regime is shaken, the final outcome depends a good deal on the extent of the loyalty of these men, all the more so since the directors of the great administrative services of the state tend to conform their attitude to that of their comrades, placed at the crossroads of the two kingdoms of Politics and Administration.

Hence, there is an entire science of politico-administrative topography and even a topology. It is the basis of the new profession of "public relations."

This fact poses the problem of interferences between this

## *Where is the Power?*

politico-administrative circle and that of business. There is no field less known, and into which investigation is more difficult. Politicians and officials are not given to confess to dangerous liaisons. The economic powers know that nothing is more perilous for them than the spotlight of publicity. The wall of silence stands high on both sides.

The political science specialist who attempts the research return from his trip with his ears resounding from mollifying statements, all tending to deny the very existence of the problem.

And yet it exists. Let us disregard the anecdotal aspect, that is, the undeniable solidarity between high officials and managers of big business, who have received the same education, belonged to the same social group and frequently even come from the same families—a solidarity accentuated by the desire of the civil servant to find later a better-paid position with his employer friend. This indisputable state of affairs is in certain respects advantageous, for social cohesion at the level in question is strengthened; in other respects, of course, it is most regrettable.

It does not matter less that the power at the disposal of the economic and financial circles does not draw its force and longevity from this situation. It is obvious that an advertized friendship leads to the suspicion of collusion. And from collusion to corruption, for the ill-disposed, there are only two syllables to be changed. Hence, a great prudence is in order and conversations that permit taking into account a common identity of approach rather than achieving concrete results.

The action of the unions (managerial or labor) in the service of properly political circles is not any more effective. The list of venal parliamentarians is known to everyone. Suddenly, their support becomes compromising.

There remains one main sector: the influence of public opinion. It is a fact that, in the great western democracies, the great press is in the hands of the moneyed powers.

What is the use they make of this essential instrument?

Mostly a negative one, which is not to say negligible. It is rare that a financial group operates with a precise aim in view, if we make exception for such almost comic cases as the *Comité des Forges*, which before the war subsidized a left-wing daily for the purpose of campaigning against wooden railroad cars.



On the other hand, it is not a matter of indifference that there should be silence on the subject of nationalizations (or concentrations), which have been realized or are projected. The major press can, in this fashion, to some extent sterilize public opinion in those areas in which the susceptibility of the business magnates is especially touchy.

A study should be undertaken, specifically on the attitude of the great trusts with regard to the policy of European unification, a complex, changing and diverse, if not divergent, attitude, according to the country in question. Here, too, positions of principle are taken, less by the chiefs themselves than by their staffs. Here, as in state administration, the choices are dictated by the work carried out by obscure collaborators and often on the basis of second-hand information.

Generally speaking, the universitarian, who is in the habit of never making a statement unless it is based on faultless documentation, would be flabbergasted to see with what carelessness certain conclusions are presented to political leaders or to directors of big business. The motivations for these sometimes chance positions frequently stem more from reflex than reflection—reflex, or rather a series of reflexes, set in motion by reading the papers, listening to the radio and watching television.

Thus, one is led to believe that the classic fourth estate is in reality the first. Not that the editorialists, the desk chiefs or the reporters obey precise orders, or even follow solid personal convictions. Most often, they follow intellectual fashions and thus reinforce the currents, which, in the beginning, were only lightly sketched out. In this fashion certain *schemas* have become established in leading opinion, certain fleeting remarks soon become passwords and even intellectual attitudes. The rapidity of diffusion produces chain reactions. The slogan, emitted by the commentator, is tossed back at him by a listener who believes, in good faith, that he had invented it.

The circle is closed. The cohesion of society is assured. The freedom of thought and expression is no longer a danger to anyone. The limits within which it evolves are fixed by the mental horizon of a few tenors of the telescreen and the great magazines.

The official power, in other words, the government, would

## *Where is the Power?*

itself have the greatest trouble in demolishing the myths, which it created or allowed to be created. Every statesman of our time is a Pygmalion. But it is not a question of his marrying the statue. Galatea flees, becomes an announcer and dreams of producing a program herself.

This conditioning of the public would not be too serious if it did not at the same time reach as individuals those responsible, and especially the officials, whom no decree forbids having personal opinions. From then on these opinions are furnished to them by specialized enterprises. Are they conscious of this fact? It is doubtful.

But, in our overworked society, certain areas of the public service constitute islands of study and calm, where reflection can be freely and efficaciously exercised. Still, the condition is that the habit of reflection not be enfeebled by the facility of audio-visual media.

Certain groups of young officials, swelled by young business leaders and young trade-unionists, could constitute what Jacques Maritain calls "the minorities of prophetic shock," and to whom he assigns the task of arousing public opinion. "This is a finding," he writes, "for better or for worse, that great historic changes, in political societies, are the work of a few individuals, who are convinced they incarnate the genuine will (to be awakened) of the people, in contrast with its desire to sleep."<sup>2</sup>

The influence of these groups surpasses the collective influence of their members. The publications coming out of their conferences often have an unsuspected impact in depth.

Gradually a subtle network between associations of the same type is created within the political universe. We have seen recently one of the *policy-makers* in the United States, Dean Acheson, take the trouble of explaining the policies of his country to an Italian group of this kind, which, however, did not feature any figure of the so-called "international" class. The American statesman, guided by his instinct, had rightly thought that it was worth more to plant the seed in prepared soil than to toss it in the air along the main highways.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Maritain, *L'homme et l'État* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France), p. 129.

One of the most disregarded laws of present-day society is that reflection constitutes a value, whose output is the most certain and the most swift. In an age in which the time of reflection (and not only the time for reflection) becomes a luxury, almost a privilege; those who can and know how to dispose of it have from the start a considerable advantage. If they train themselves systematically in this anachronistic exercise, they are certain to augment their advance. And, when the moment of choice has arrived, they will decide matters with the superior ease of one who, having studied all the elements for a long time, has only to weigh them in the balance.

In a very near future, actual power may very easily come not to the busy technocrat, worried about the immediate efficacy of things, but to his colleague from the research bureau who will have foreseen (including his own errors in foresight) and have placed his odds (by taking clearly accepted calculated risks).

What can we answer in effect to a planifier, who anticipates the objections of his interlocutor (which he will have asked himself a long time ago)? In this dialogue he will be the chess player who will have had one turn in advance. It matters little that someone else takes the decision. It is still he who will have dictated it.

We may conclude from this that the state that first carries out a radical administrative reform will easily outdistance the others. The viscosity of administration is most certainly, in present-day international life, the most widely shared common trait. There is nothing more similar than the sclerosis of the American and Soviet bureaucracies. It is even an element of stability which enters into the calculations of the two great powers.

Let us assume that a state decides to modernize fundamentally its administrative apparatus. It sets funds aside for organs of reflection, powerfully equipped, disposing of microfilm, electronic devices and above all a personnel both specialized and polyvalent. It shortens the routes that lead from conception to execution. The latter, almost automatically assured, is automatically controlled, which does not, quite on the contrary, exclude the spirit of initiative, which is rewarded on all levels. Considerations of longevity of service and personal convenience are eliminated.

## *Where is the Power?*

Only professional worth, judged according to the results, counts, the job being strictly separated from the rank.

An inhuman regime, one will say. Nothing is less certain. Man prefers to be associated with a creative collective, even at the price of greater effort, than to be on the passive receiving end of a system whose final aims he does not comprehend.

Certainly personal and jurisdictional quarrels, a tremendous reason for loss of energy, will not be avoided. But they will be limited by letting rival services compete, a method impracticable in a bottled up administration. It is completely realizable in a disburdened administration, according to the educational principles of Pascal's father, maintained at a level above its work, instead of being drowned in it.

The state that would have the courage to carry out such a revolution would be victorious. These considerations apply in the same measure, if not more, to countries on the way to development. Their economic and social progress is entirely linked with the establishment of a valid administrative infrastructure. Any technical cooperation not based on very advanced administrative mutual aid is doomed to failure. The only advantage the new countries have at their disposal is the absence of administrative traditions. They can build from a *tabula rasa*. Unfortunately, they seem little responsive to this trump card, and their rare elites are more attracted by the game of politics than by the stern apprenticeship in the methods of management of a modern state.

The old countries, encumbered by taboos inherited from centuries of administration, hardly demonstrate their hurry to change their skin. And yet their future is at stake. But who, among individuals and nations, is wise enough to sacrifice his tranquillity of the moment for a good in the future, however certain?

It is true that such a transformation would pose with even more acuteness than now the problem of the mode of selection of political leaders.

In fact, in the system that actually prevails everywhere the administrative sclerosis plays the role of a shock absorber. The political leaders, parliamentary or otherwise (and if they are not parliamentarians, they still must take Parliament into account),

navigate between the demands of Parliament and the reserves of the administration. It is easy for them to oppose the two powers against each other, and thus to neutralize them reciprocally.

From the day on which a dynamic and efficient administration is born, everything changes. It becomes absolutely necessary to keep control of it so that it not sacrifice everything to technocratic activism. From then on, the political leaders must be capable not only of surmounting resistances and overcoming passivities, but of orienting and channeling the forces in action. In a state having a remodeled administration, the political leaders should be, it seems, either former high officials or directors of great national enterprises (nationalized, semi-nationalized or private). Only such people would know how to impose their will on officials disposing of modern techniques and animated by the desire for effectiveness, on the condition, of course, that these men would be willing to run the risks of reelection. The official-minister never has the same authority with his subordinates as the man elected by the people. He lacks the prestige of the victorious combatant, the holy balm of the vote. So far as the businessman is concerned, he will need popular investiture all the more that he will always (except in the United States) be suspected of confusing, even in good faith, the general interest with the interest of his firm.

The signs of a preference given the technician over the politician are already apparent. And the politico-administrative sector is not the only one in which the cult of competence and of the concrete is being affirmed.

It is fashionable to base great hopes, in all countries, on what is called the live forces of the nation. But they are not so live. Sclerosis in the trade unions equals, in many respects, administrative sclerosis.

And it is undoubtedly a great illusion to want to precipitate into the political struggle formations whose true bond is a fundamental allergy to ideology.

On the other hand, it is incontestible that inside these groups profound basic changes are taking place, due to the new approach to problems taken by the rising generations. They attribute primacy not only to technique, but also to social and familial considerations. The notion of the home, once so discredited by

## *Where is the Power?*

the anarchic individualism of the period after World War I, is becoming, among the working classes mainly, the keystone of social life. The consequences of this transformation are only now beginning to be felt. Everywhere, the power will be compelled to take this into account, to emphasize the familial, healthful, educational and cultural aspects of its program. The new New Deal will be geared to the promotion of families, the education of adults, and the rejuvenation of the educational system.

"We have lost everything, but education remains to us," said Fichte in 1807, one year after Jena. The maverick disciple of Kant saw in education the means of awaking Germany and of putting the nation back on its feet again. "Only the Nation which in actual practice will have solved the problem of the ideal man can create the perfect state," he writes. This view completes what has been said above about administrative reform. It makes sense only within the framework of a remolding of the entire educational system, that is, of all the institutions which are preparing the future of the nation. But it is necessary, it seems, to turn Fichte's sentence around and give preeminence to the Nation over the State.

Ortega y Gasset put it very well: "In history, it is the vitality of the nations that wins out, not the perfect form of the states."<sup>3</sup> From whence it happens that the nation is not made for the State but that the State is made for the nation.

It is well that the state reforms its administration. The whole nation will benefit from the rejuvenation of an essential instrument. But it is still more important to form the cadres of the nation in an adequate fashion.

A good state regulation will certainly not suffice. The cooperation of the entire elite is necessary. Here arises a disagreeable, almost saddening factor: a certain demise of the intellectual elites.

In a scientific society such as ours, in which knowledge is the source of power, the intellectuals, or as the people call them, the learned, could be tempted to play a preponderant role in society. They do not play this role, contrary to what they say

<sup>3</sup> Ortega y Gasset, *Le spectateur tenté* (Paris, Plon), p. 273.

and to what most people think, by their own fault. Caught in the vise of university routine, academic ambitions and political passions (such as those expressed at the most elementary level in daily and weekly papers), the intellectuals hardly any longer constitute a leading class in our countries. They have renounced (temporarily, let us hope) the calmness of clear insight. They believe they act by signing manifestoes and giving interviews. Their influence on the decisions of power is practically nil, precisely because they aspire to power or rather to its semblances.

Their role could be considerable, if their exclusive preoccupation were to search for and establish the truth. The simple statement of truth, such as it appears to an honest and objective mind, has a dynamic value. Why deprive oneself of this lawful bliss and deprive others of it? The treason of scholars is their indifference to truth, the decay of their love for truth.

This does not mean that this state of affairs will last. Once it stops, then the problem of power in our societies will be profoundly modified. The government will be compelled to take enlightened opinion into account, to the maximum degree. It will be enlightened by the elites who will pass judgement impartially (which does not mean coldly) on the subjects of their competence. A journal, such as the *Economist*, demonstrates to what extent the formula of a highly qualified and anonymous team may be fecund which is obsessed by the taste for truth and not by publicity success. We are willing to bet that a great banker from Manhattan, or a leading official of the State Department, attach more importance to the unsigned diagnoses of the *Economist* than to the brilliant articles of a fashionable editorial writer.

By the nature of things, we come back to the problem of the necessity for power to have the organs of reflection at its disposal. Whether they are integrated into it or not, in favor or hostile to it, is of little importance. In this matter, pluralism is necessary. Nothing is more dangerous and more derisory than official thinkers. But the interest of power, its most egotistical interest, is to develop everywhere, on all levels, the taste, the practice and even the passion for reflection.

Reflection is the only means man has found up to now to develop his intelligence. And intelligence is the sole commodity

*Where is the Power?*

whose abundance will never pose problems. The duty of everyone is hence clear. "Let us work to think well."

It is not desirable that philosophers become kings. They would no longer have the time to philosophize. But if philosophers become more numerous (and, in the final analysis, everyone can and should hope to become a philosopher) and if they philosophize instead of polemicizing, it is not inconceivable that one day the kings themselves, unknown to them perhaps, will become philosophers.