

Where Do We Go From Here?

Government

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About This Series

These working papers are intended to be precisely what they are called.

They make no pretence to finished, authoritative, or even totally coherent. They are intended to be used by anyone who is not an expert in the particular field covered by the Paper, but who wants to have some framework to help him understand where we are, what is wrong with society, and how we might set about putting it right.

For those who wish to follow up the subject, a basic reading list is provided which in turn could lead to more detailed study of particular aspects of the problem.

The Papers will be continuously revised and amended during the next few years. For this reason, please write in with any significant suggested amendments or comments, or any vital piece of information which you consider relevant, Your suggestions will all be considered, and incorporated in future editions.

The subjects covered in the first series will be:

Housing Agriculture Government

Education Industry & Energy Employment

Land

Money Health Transport

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GOVERNMENT

Government is not just one subject among others. A change in the attitude to Government and a change in the function of Government is at the basis of all the more detailed strategies discussed in other working papers. and what is said in general terms in this paper is made more specific in the others.

Where Are We ?

Sovereignty

To 'govern' means to make rules and regulations to control the behaviour of groups of people, and to have some kind of power or authority to ensure that these rules and regulations are carried out.

In this sense, we have all kinds of 'governments'. ranging from the local darts club we have joined to the United Nations. They all have power to regulate certain aspects of our lives, and some authority to see that the regulations are carried out. Government is a commonplace feature of social life. and it appears in a thousand different shapes and sizes.

The first experience a child has of government is normally in the nuclear family in our country, where the parents have a very wide ranging legal and moral authority over the growing child, matched by duties of care and education owed to the child.

As the child grows up, he becomes involved in other communities or groups. such as the school community and the work community, all of which have their own system of government, which he is obliged to accept if he wants to be part of the group.

However this is not at all what most of us mean by "The Government". Amongst all these groups which organise our behaviour the growing person becomes more and more aware of an overarching 'Government' which seems to be quite unlike all the others. It is remote, and all embracing. It is backed up by folk-lore, and associated with kings and queens, battles and pageantry. In spite of its remoteness, it somehow seems to be part of ourselves. Its powers are not limited to any particular field like chess or education. It can make rules about everything. Its only limitation is territorial; it has supreme power in a particular plot of land. We normally have no choice as to whether we join the group which accepts the authority of the government because we are born 'under' it, and it is not normal to think of leaving it.

What we have described as a commonplace experience can be translated into political theory in terms of the doctrine of sovereignty, and can be put into historical perspective, as we shall try to do, in terms of the rise of the nation state. But it is the commonplace experience which gives us a first hand understanding of the most important feature of the governmental situation of most of the human race in the twentieth century; and that is a. colossal accumulation of power at the level of the nation state.

Size

The characteristic of the present time is the enormous size and power of the Government machinery, compared with the position even 20 years ago.

Local Government employs directly 2 million people, and the Central Government nearly 1 million people. This is about one sixth of the total available workforce in the country

