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Abstract

Discusses the rise of bureaucratic organization in the Third Age as a response to denser population and the needs of war and administration; considers the pitfalls and advantages of bureaucratic organization and Tolkien's attitudes towards it.

Additional Keywords

Bureaucracy in *The Lord of the Rings*; Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*—Government; Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*—Social organization

BUREAUCRATIZATION IN THE LORD OF THE RINGS

THOMAS GRAY

In Tolkien's day, as well as in our own, it seemed good sense to oppose the bureaucratization of human life and to deplore the destructive results of bureaucratic technology. In the fantasy world which Tolkien envisioned, man (and all the speaking peoples) could potentially live in harmony with each other and thus needed no organizing force beyond Nature and an individual commitment to the "Good". Consequently most of his people, hobbits in particular, live without any bureaucracies or formal organizations of any sort.

The bureaucracy, like other forms of social organization, is *goal oriented*. Some definite productive purpose characterizes every bureaucracy, even if that purpose is to produce a body count or a set amount of destruction. Bureaucracy is a formal attempt to organize the actions of a group of individuals. It parcels out power and specifies tasks so that the greater goals of the group can be accomplished. Bureaucracy is defined by a *hierarchy*, which designates a system of superiors and subordinates in the power structure, and by a set of *rules*, which structure activities of individuals in the group and create *specialization* of work. In a typical bureaucracy everyone knows what to do and to whom to report. People doing the right thing for the right people are praised; all others are ignored or condemned. Sociologists like Max Weber believe that as societies become more complex (with more disunity and diversion of opinion) this form of organization tends to supplant more primitive types of authority such as *traditional* leadership, based on heredity and family ties, or *charismatic* leadership, based on a single dynamic personality.

Tolkien felt that bureaucracy was dehumanizing and demeaning, and he consistently associates it with "Evil". In the works about Middle Earth he implies that bureaucracy was bred in the Darkness. The worst possible people--Morgoth, Sauron--are the best organized. Nevertheless, Tolkien's story admits that bureaucracy plays an integral part in the struggle for good in Middle Earth. Those who are ignorant of bureaucratic principles become slaves and those who neglect bureaucratic practice fail in their purpose.

Most of the people at the end of the Third Age live in isolated, loosely-organized groups which lack even simple trade agreements. In consequence these groups frequently lose contact with each other. The Silvan Elves don't know whether the High Elves still live in Middle Earth (I,352); the dwarves are sundered from their kindred for long years. And the hobbits don't know where anyone is.

Bureaucratization is almost non-existent among hobbits. Instead they employ traditional

leadership. "The Shire at this time had hardly any 'government'. Families for the most part managed their own affairs." Hobbits lived according to an oral tradition which they must have learned by rote, along with such skills as animal husbandry and metallurgy as it has descended from the Númenóreans: "There remained, of course, the ancient tradition concerning the high king of Fornost (and the hobbits) attributed to the king of old all their essential laws; and usually they kept the laws of free will, because they were The Rules (as they said), both ancient and just." Even their defense forces (Hobbitry-in-arms) had been allowed to lapse (I,18).

The other peoples exhibited varying degrees of disorganization. Elves were semi-nomadic people governed by a hereditary tribal leadership. Elf leaders resemble the chiefs of the American Plains Indians who lead by example, persuading rather than compelling. Dwarves are better organized, with Kingdoms and trade interests, but they were not numerous and not inclined to open their organizations to outsiders.

The best administrators in Middle Earth are the Men of Númenor. Assembling that mammoth fleet for the assault on the Undying Lands (Akallabeth, 277) required administrative ability. The Númenóreans established empires and taught other men in Middle Earth to govern themselves. Even in its decline the last Númenórean Kingdom of Gondor still showed signs of bureaucratic organization in its more able rulers. Faramir, for example, governs his guerilla force with a stern hand, strictly enforcing every rule, except in the most unusual circumstances. I think that one of the reasons that Sauron got on so well with the Númenóreans (Akallabeth, 271) was their common interest in bureaucracy.

Sauron is very well organized--he has to be! Consider the nature of the individuals on whom he must rely: the orc is treacherous, cruel, greedy, foul-tempered, destructive and easily frightened. Trolls are worse. The men in Sauron's service are surly, cowardly and mean. Who could work with a crew like that? Only a very good administrator.

Sauron's forces at the Siege of Gondor provide an excellent example of what a bureaucracy can do with even the most middling material. The army of the Nazgul bests the City's defenders time and again. Gondor is saved only by a miracle. The Siege of Gondor is probably the shortest siege in history. The Nazgul breach the first circle of the city in 12 hours. A Medieval analogy might be the Siege of Constantinople in 1453. That walled city withstood the Turks for 55 days under very similar circumstances.

Before the gate of Minas Tirith the orcs and

trolls fight dutifully. Even when "the ground was choked with wreck and the bodies of the slain; yet still driven as by a madness more and more came up." When a crazed elephant "spread stamping ruin among the orcs innumerable...their bodies were cast aside from its path and others took their place" (III, 102). If this activity is indeed due to "madness", it is extremely well organized insanity.

The defenders within the City do not acquit themselves nearly as well. "Fires now raged unchecked in the first circle of the City and the garrison upon the outer wall was already in many places cut off from retreat. But the faithful who remained at their posts were few; most had fled beyond the second gate" (III, 98). On his way to the battle Pippin meets men "flying back from the burning". Poor Beregonid is not the only one of the defenders who should have been tried for the treason of leaving his post.

Minas Tirith's gate is thrown down largely because the defenders are not bureaucratized. When a crisis separates them from their traditional leaders, the people of Minas Tirith don't know what to do or who to obey. When the Lord of the Nazgul is destroyed the next official in the bureaucratic chain of command, one Gothmog, takes control of the enemy forces and the battle goes on. But when Denethor lays down his traditional authority and his only surviving heir, Faramir, cannot succeed him, the city is left without adequate leadership. An attempt is made to appoint a temporary "charismatic" leader (Gandalf/Mithrandir) but Denethor's messengers inform him "Not all will follow Mithrandir. Men are flying from the walls and leaving them unmanned" (III, 98). There is even an unthinkable clash between the body guard and the soldiery in the hallows of Rath Dinen. The City is in such a state of disorder that the battle is nearly lost a second time when Aragorn's Fleet is sighted. Men "ran to the bells and tolled the alarm; and some blew the trumpets sounding the retreat. 'Back to the Walls!' they cried. 'Back to the Walls!'" Fortunately the miracle-bringing South Wind "blew all their clamour away" (III, 122). Only this wind saved them from the consequences of having no proper bureaucratic structure.

Of course Tolkien makes a strong case for fearing bureaucracy; like all tokens of power, it must be used with care and wisdom or it can cause great harm. He suggests that if Sauron's organization had been a little better he would have won. Close examination reveals that the orcs were *under-bureaucratized!* The most costly mistakes made by Sauron's forces occur when orc leaders of equal rank encounter each other with conflicting orders. Merry and Pippin are taken across the plain of Rohan instead of being whisked off to Mordor because Sauron's officer, Grishnakh, is forced to give way to Saruman's orc leader, Uglúk. In a strict bureaucratic hierarchy it would have been clear that Sauron's official was to be obeyed. The entire Quest is later rescued in a bloody manner when two orc lieutenants quarrel over Fordo's mithril shirt. Again it is clear who should prevail. Shagrat obeys Sauron's orders to keep the prisoner and his things intact, but Gorbag, the Morgul orc, turns renegade and tries to steal the shirt away. Finally, when Fordo and Sam both fall into Enemy hands, a mix-up over precedent on entering the plain of Udun frees them and places them on the very road to the Dark Tower and Mount Doom. If Sauron had spent some of his hoarded mithril on a good organizational analysis, he might have saved himself a lot of grief. He was penny wise and pound foolish (II, 100).

Aside from these helpful mistakes, the only way the people of Middle Earth are able to

effectively combat evil is through some fundamental bureaucratizing. The "Scouring of the Shire" stands as an excellent example. Farmer Cotton observes that "we can master them (the ruffians), if we stick together". But no one in the Shire knows how to "stick together". Only the Travelers, who have been apprenticing in Southern Wars have the administrative skills to save the day. ("That is what you have been trained for," remarks Gandalf, III, 275.) Whereas a hobbit mob is almost certain to be beaten by a ruffian mob, a bureaucratized, disciplined hobbit force easily defeats the "Bounders". Merry and Pippin employ sound principles of bureaucratic leadership to overturn the inefficient bureaucracy established by Saruman (whose administrative abilities are waning with the rest of his powers).

A well structured bureaucracy can be used to a good or ill effect, depending on the purpose of the user. But a badly designed bureaucracy, such as Saruman created in the Shire is harmful to everyone--even its maker. Tolkien would have us believe that Saruman's "organization" of the Shire, with the long lists of inhuman rules and surplus of police, is the prototype of bureaucracy. In fact it is the very worst stereotype--one made up of petty demagoguery and rules which serve no purpose. As we have seen at the Siege of Gondor, bureaucracy is a most hardy and useful form of organization. In a percent hierarchy there can be no lack of leadership since every individual (except the one on the bottom) has a position of authority; a perfect set of rules leaves no task undone nor any doubt in the minds of the doers. This is all very useful when there is a crisis or an immediate danger. Why then did Tolkien dislike true bureaucracy so much? He explains it very clearly through his identification with the Elves.

The Elves are the first children of Eru--people of the Twilight--who knew Middle Earth when it was still a place of harmony and unity. After the treachery of Morgoth and the killing of the Two Trees, this harmony was shattered forever (The Silmarillion, 75-79). Morgoth reunited selected parts of Middle Earth and reorganized them for his own purposes using the most powerful tool available--bureaucracy. The Free Peoples were forced to do the same in order to organize resistance against him. Yet this entire enterprise--organizing, fighting, submerging individual goals for the sake of the group--went totally against the nature of the Elves (and Tolkien). Elven souls desire to learn and teach, live and let live. Therefore, they ignore evil when they can, prefer to leave the fighting to others and unite only at great need, as in the Battle before Thangorodrim or at the Last Alliance Elrond (who is quite notably *Halfelven* in this instance) laments that the Elves lose interest after each apparent victory. Time and again they fail to follow-up their advantages. The Enemy reorganizes and returns (I, 256).

Tolkien does not specifically state that Morgoth invented bureaucracy, although he certainly made it necessary. Morgoth did not, for instance, teach Elves or men any administrative skills (although the Númenóreans may have perfected them under Sauron). Therefore it is reasonable to assume that bureaucracy is a naturally occurring solution to the problem of disharmony and disunity. Men seem to be better constituted than Elves to make use of bureaucracy to attain their long term goals, for men (like the Entwives) aim at artificially controlling and ordering others about.

Thus the fourth Age, an age which must put together the fragmented pieces of Middle Earth, will be the Age of Men--a time of bureaucracy used for good purposes. Aragorn is charged with the

bureaucratization of Middle Earth. To do this he recognizes areas like the West March and establishes hierarchy so that the governing authorities of the colonies are answerable to him. with the help of the *palantiri* he reestablishes communication throughout his realm reopening roads and personally visiting various provinces. He replaces tradition with new laws (one of which forbids Men to enter the Shire) and establishes embassies with foreign lands. He holds Pippin to his vows as a knight of Gondor and sends him out as an agent to the Shire, even as Sauron and Saruman once sent their agents. But this time the purpose is for

good rather than evil. The extent to which Aragorn's kingdom will be a success will be largely determined by his ability to rule justly through chosen subordinates, create effective laws and integrate the diverse peoples in his kingdom; in a word, to *bureaucratize* effectively.

It is conventional wisdom that the ends do not justify the means. It is also true that the ends do not condemn the means. Bureaucratic means provide a great strength which the inhabitants of Tolkien's world turn to good ends as often as bad ones.

THREE LETTERS BY J.R.R. TOLKIEN

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS

NOTED BY J.R. CHRISTOPHER

In the summer of 1977 I spent two weeks working at the Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas, Austin, mainly concerned with preparing notes of the Dorothy L. Sayers manuscripts there. Sunday evening before the first Monday I was to spend in the library, I relocated the building (I had been there just once before) and found a display of fantasy works in the lobby, including the manuscript of G.K. Chesterton's The Man Who Was Thursday. (Appropriately enough for fantasy works, the display vanished--having been up for two weeks, I was told--between Monday morning and noon on my first day in the library.) Later, when I was discussing the display with Wendell Wagner, Jr., a fellow Mythopoeic Society member who was working in the H.R.C. that summer, he mentioned that the rest of the display, unseen by me on an upper floor, had included a letter or two by J.R.R. Tolkien. Delighted with the chance of holding some of Tolkien's manuscripts in my hands, I worked in time to look at his letters; there were three of them, and I made the following descriptions.

1. To John Masefield (1878-1967). Dated Friday, 14 July (no year). Handwritten (actually printed, as Tolkien normally did) on both sides of a small piece of grey stationery, with Tolkien's Oxford address (20 Northmoor Road) and telephone number printed at the top; signed.

Tolkien writes apologetically because he has missed the deadline for the program (of the year's Oxford Summer Diversions); he had looked through The Canterbury Tales and some of Gower (probably Confessio Amantis, since it is in English) for something suitable and then had to grade some Civil Service papers. Last night he finally worked out the reading: either the same as the previous year, or a cut version of "The Reeve's Tale" with one revised link for one passage cut and with the Northern dialect as worked out in Tolkien's article.

Comment: this letter belongs to 1939, for that was the year Tolkien recited "The Reeve's Tale" from memory at the Summer Diversions; the previous year he had done "The Nun's Priest's Tale" (Humphrey Carpenter, Tolkien: A Biography [Boston: Houghton Mifflin Com-

pany, 1977], p. 214). Tolkien's article referred to it in the letter as "Chaucer as a Philologist: The Reeve's Tale", in Transactions of the Philological Society (1934), pp. 1-70. The lines proposed for cutting in the reading were ll. 57-66, 257-352 (with a supplied link), 363-364, and 397-398.

2. To Terence Tiller (1916-). Dated 2 November 1956. Handprinted on both sides of a piece of stationery with Tolkien's Oxford address (79 Sandfield Road, Headington) and phone number at the top; signed. Two pencil lines on the back side opposite a comment about the Rohirrim.

Tolkien thanks Tiller for copies of the first three scripts (of Tiller's adaptation of The Lord of the Rings for B.B.C. radio); Tolkien replies to a question about accents, indicating he does not think modern dialects, such as Cockney, should be used to characterize species, such as Orcs; in particular, none of the inhabitants of Minas Tirith--since it was the source and standard of Common Speech--would have accents; the Rohirrim might speak the Common Speech somewhat carefully, as a learned language, but even that is not always true, for Theoden was born in Gondor, etc.

3. To Terence Tiller. Dated 6 November 1956. Handprinted on both sides of the same type of stationery as in (2); signed.

Tolkien has now read the three scripts and finds them clear; but, privately, he asks Tiller what the point is of condensing The Lord of the Rings into such a cramped form when the book needs more time; he points to several episodes which have been overly condensed in this handling, and regrets that the form could not have been more narrative and less dramatic.

Comment: Tolkien is on record against the use of fairy material in stage plays ("On Fairy-stories", in Tree and Leaf [London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964], 46-48, 67-68); but he does not comment on radio drama, which is a partly narrative form in its use of an announcer to set scenes and bridge between dialogues.