

CRITERIA OF GOOD GOVERNMENT

What is the best form of government is a question which no responsible person who has made a careful study of history and political thought would pretend to give a correct answer. But as to what the test of a good government is, there seems to be acceptable replies. The philosopher Spinoza writes that there is a good government when under it people pass their lives in unity and laws are uniformly observed.

Some writers (See Michael Stewart in *Modern Forms of Government*) tell us that to judge the success of the work of a government we need to be guided by the following test: safety, prosperity, and dignity. Political activity which comprises the nature and purpose of government work has to establish effectively peace and order for the protection of life and property. It is not enough, however, that we should be protected against dangers and violence proceeding from individuals or

gangs dedicated to crime and lawlessness. It is also absolutely necessary that we receive proper safeguards and defenses against abusive acts and oppressive measures of public officials and the government itself. The government should make it possible for people to improve their material standard of living, to reduce and eliminate pauperism, sickness, and ignorance. Then it should encourage people to raise their level of culture and to elevate their sense of appreciation of ethical and artistic values; and all these lead to the cultivation and acquisition of the spirit of human dignity.

All these functions, however, presuppose a certain general criterion applicable to the government itself. It is a criterion by which the nature, the vitality, the competency, and the integrity of the government are determined. The objectives of political activity cannot be achieved if these essential

qualities are not found in all the governmental organs. The value of any government would be purely illusory without them. In fact, its very existence could be pernicious to the interests of the individual and the nation. Stewart puts the matter in these terms: "If a man is told that his government protects him from bandits, he expects the government's behavior towards him to be better than that of a bandit. If he is taxed for no social purpose, but to provide his rulers with luxuries, or if the police expect him to give bribes, arrest him on bogus charges or interrogate him

with brutality, he might as well pay ransom to a bandit. If he is told that the government's policy enables him to get a proper standard of life, he asks what a proper standard of life is." To answer this question, he may compare the present and the past conditions of life, those in his own community with those in other communities more or less similarly situated. As he pursues this series of questioning he and his fellows are likely to arrive at such conclusions as may provide the justification of a government's existence. — V. G. S.

PRAISE

When I was young I had an elderly friend who used often to ask me to stay with him in the country. He was a religious man and he read prayers to the assembled household every morning. But he had crossed out in pencil all the passages in the Book of Common Prayer that praised God. He said that there was nothing so vulgar as to praise people to their faces and, himself a gentleman, he could not believe that God was so ungentlemanly as to like it. — W. Somerset Maugham