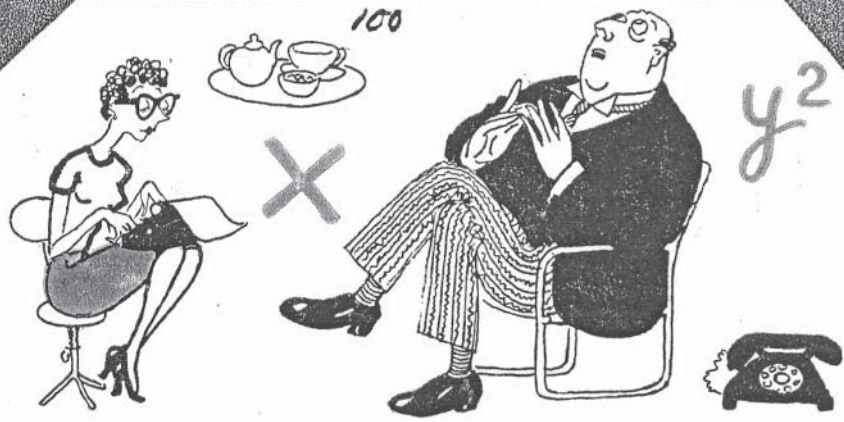
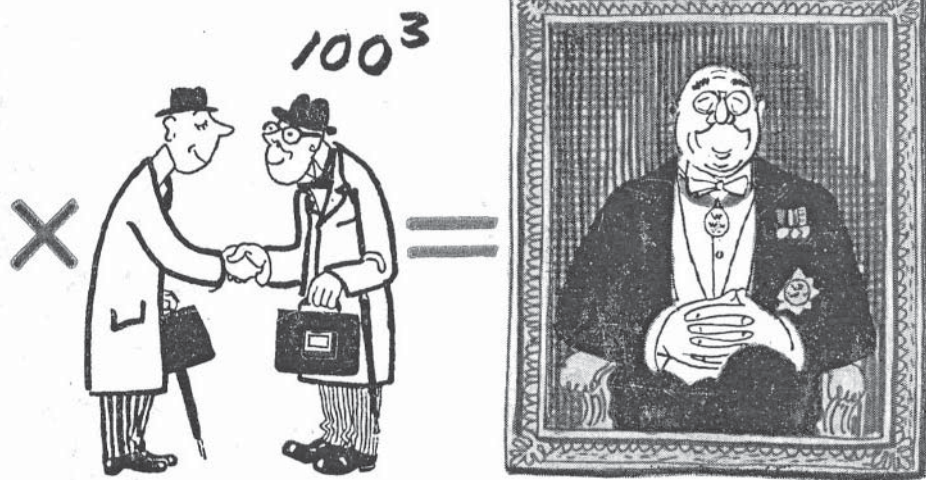


Parkinson's Law

John  
Murray



# Parkinson's Law or The Pursuit of Progress



C. Northcote Parkinson  
Illustrated by Osbert Lancaster

## PARKINSON'S LAW

### *or the Rising Pyramid*

Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion. General recognition of this fact is shown in the proverbial phrase 'It is the busiest man who has time to spare.' Thus, an elderly lady of leisure can spend the entire day in writing and dispatching a postcard to her niece at Bognor Regis. An hour will be spent in finding the postcard, another in hunting for spectacles, half an hour in a search for the address, an hour and a quarter in composition, and twenty minutes in deciding whether or not to take an umbrella when going to the pillar box in the next street. The total effort that would occupy a busy man for three minutes all told may in this fashion leave another person prostrate after a day of doubt, anxiety, and toil.

Granted that work (and especially paper-work) is thus elastic in its demands on time, it is manifest that there need be little or no relationship between the work to be done and the size of the staff to which it may be assigned. A lack of real activity does not, of necessity, result in leisure. A lack of occupation is not necessarily revealed by a manifest idleness. The thing to be done swells in importance and complexity in a direct ratio with the time to be spent. This fact is widely recognized, but less attention has been paid

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to its wider implications, more especially in the field of public administration. Politicians and taxpayers have assumed (with occasional phases of doubt) that a rising total in the number of civil servants must reflect a growing volume of work to be done. Cynics, in questioning this belief, have imagined that the multiplication of officials must have left some of them idle or all of them able to work for shorter hours. But this is a matter in which faith and doubt seem equally misplaced. The fact is that the number of the officials and the quantity of the work are not related to each other at all. The rise in the total of those employed is governed by Parkinson's Law and would be much the same whether the volume of the work were to increase, diminish, or even disappear. The importance of Parkinson's Law lies in the fact that it is a law of growth based upon an analysis of the factors by which that growth is controlled.

The validity of this recently discovered law must rest mainly on statistical proofs, which will follow. Of more interest to the general reader is the explanation of the factors underlying the general tendency to which this law gives definition. Omitting technicalities (which are numerous) we may distinguish at the outset two motive forces. They can be represented for the present purpose by two almost axiomatic statements, thus: (1) 'An official wants to multiply subordinates, not rivals' and (2) 'Officials make work for each other.'

To comprehend Factor 1, we must picture a civil servant, called A, who finds himself overworked. Whether this overwork is real or imaginary is immaterial, but we should observe, in passing, that A's sensation (or illusion)

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might easily result from his own decreasing energy: a normal symptom of middle age. For this real or imagined overwork there are, broadly speaking, three possible remedies. He may resign; he may ask to halve the work with a colleague called B; he may demand the assistance of two subordinates, to be called C and D. There is probably no instance, however, in history of A choosing any but the third alternative. By resignation he would lose his pension rights. By having B appointed, on his own level in the hierarchy, he would merely bring in a rival for promotion to W's vacancy when W (at long last) retires. So A would rather have C and D, junior men, below him. They will add to his consequence and, by dividing the work into two categories, as between C and D, he will have the merit of being the only man who comprehends them both. It is essential to realize at this point that C and D are, as it were, inseparable. To appoint C alone would have been impossible. Why? Because C, if by himself, would divide the work with A and so assume almost the equal status that has been refused in the first instance to B; a status the more emphasized if C is A's only possible successor. Subordinates must thus number two or more, each being thus kept in order by fear of the other's promotion. When C complains in turn of being overworked (as he certainly will) A will, with the concurrence of C, advise the appointment of two assistants to help C. But he can then avert internal friction only by advising the appointment of two more assistants to help D, whose position is much the same. With this recruitment of E, F, G, and H the promotion of A is now practically certain.

Seven officials are now doing what one did before. This

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is where Factor 2 comes into operation. For these seven make so much work for each other that all are fully occupied and A is actually working harder than ever. An incoming document may well come before each of them in turn. Official E decides that it falls within the province of F, who places a draft reply before C, who amends it drastically before consulting D, who asks G to deal with it. But G goes on leave at this point, handing the file over to H, who drafts a minute that is signed by D and returned to C, who revises his draft accordingly and lays the new version before A.

What does A do? He would have every excuse for signing the thing unread, for he has many other matters on his mind. Knowing now that he is to succeed W next year, he has to decide whether C or D should succeed to his own office. He had to agree to G's going on leave even if not yet strictly entitled to it. He is worried whether H should not have gone instead, for reasons of health. He has looked pale recently—partly but not solely because of his domestic troubles. Then there is the business of F's special increment of salary for the period of the conference and E's application for transfer to the Ministry of Pensions. A has heard that D is in love with a married typist and that G and F are no longer on speaking terms—no one seems to know why. So A might be tempted to sign C's draft and have done with it. But A is a conscientious man. Beset as he is with problems created by his colleagues for themselves and for him—created by the mere fact of these officials' existence—he is not the man to shirk his duty. He reads through the draft with care, deletes the fussy paragraphs added by C and H, and restores the thing to the form preferred in

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the first instance by the able (if quarrelsome) F. He corrects the English—none of these young men can write grammatically—and finally produces the same reply he would have written if officials C to H had never been born. Far more people have taken far longer to produce the same result. No one has been idle. All have done their best. And it is late in the evening before A finally quits his office and begins the return journey to Ealing. The last of the office lights are being turned off in the gathering dusk that marks the end of another day's administrative toil. Among the last to leave, A reflects with bowed shoulders and a wry smile that late hours, like grey hairs, are among the penalties of success.

From this description of the factors at work the student of political science will recognize that administrators are more or less bound to multiply. Nothing has yet been said, however, about the period of time likely to elapse between the date of A's appointment and the date from which we can calculate the pensionable service of H. Vast masses of statistical evidence have been collected and it is from a study of this data that Parkinson's Law has been deduced. Space will not allow of detailed analysis but the reader will be interested to know that research began in the Navy Estimates. These were chosen because the Admiralty's responsibilities are more easily measurable than those of, say, the Board of Trade. The question is merely one of numbers and tonnage. Here are some typical figures. The strength of the Navy in 1914 could be shown as 146,000 officers and men, 3249 dockyard officials and clerks, and 57,000 dockyard workmen. By 1928 there were only 100,000 officers and men and only 62,439 workmen, but

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the dockyard officials and clerks by then numbered 4558. As for warships, the strength in 1928 was a mere fraction of what it had been in 1914—fewer than 20 capital ships in commission as compared with 62. Over the same period the Admiralty officials had increased in number from 2000 to 3569, providing (as was remarked) 'a magnificent navy on land'. These figures are more clearly set forth in tabular form:

ADMIRALTY STATISTICS

<i>Classification</i>	<i>Year</i>		<i>Increase or Decrease %</i>
	<i>1914</i>	<i>1928</i>	
Capital ships in commission	62	20	-67.74
Officers and men in R.N.	146,000	100,000	-31.5
Dockyard workers	57,000	62,439	+9.54
Dockyard officials and clerks	3249	4558	+40.28
Admiralty officials	2000	3569	+78.45

The criticism voiced at the time centred on the ratio between the number of those available for fighting and those available only for administration. But that comparison is not to the present purpose. What we have to note is that the 2000 officials of 1914 had become the 3569 of 1928; and that this growth was unrelated to any possible increase in their work. The Navy during that period had diminished, in point of fact, by a third in men and two-thirds in ships. Nor, from 1922 onward, was its strength

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even expected to increase; for its total of ships (unlike its total of officials) was limited by the Washington Naval Agreement of that year. Here we have then a 78 per cent increase over a period of fourteen years; an average of 5.6 per cent increase a year on the earlier total. In fact, as we shall see, the rate of increase was not as regular as that. All we have to consider, at this stage, is the percentage rise over a given period.

Can this rise in the total number of civil servants be accounted for except on the assumption that such a total must always rise by a law governing its growth? It might be urged at this point that the period under discussion was one of rapid development in naval technique. The use of the flying machine was no longer confined to the eccentric. Electrical devices were being multiplied and elaborated. Submarines were tolerated if not approved. Engineer officers were beginning to be regarded as almost human. In so revolutionary an age we might expect that store-keepers would have more elaborate inventories to compile. We might not wonder to see more draughtsmen on the payroll, more designers, more technicians and scientists. But these, the dockyard officials, increased only by 40 per cent in number when the men of Whitehall increased their total by nearly 80 per cent. For every new foreman or electrical engineer at Portsmouth there had to be two more clerks at Charing Cross. From this we might be tempted to conclude, provisionally, that the rate of increase in administrative staff is likely to be double that of the technical staff at a time when the actually useful strength (in this case, of seamen) is being reduced by 31.5 per cent. It has been proved statistically, however, that

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this last percentage is irrelevant. The officials would have multiplied at the same rate had there been no actual seamen at all.

It would be interesting to follow the further progress by which the 8118 Admiralty staff of 1935 came to number 33,788 by 1954. But the staff of the Colonial Office affords a better field of study during a period of imperial decline. Admiralty statistics are complicated by factors (like the Fleet Air Arm) that makes comparison difficult as between one year and the next. The Colonial Office growth is more significant in that it is more purely administrative. Here the relevant statistics are as follows:

COLONIAL OFFICE STATISTICS

<i>Year</i>	<i>1935</i>	<i>1939</i>	<i>1943</i>	<i>1947</i>	<i>1954</i>
<i>Staff</i>	372	450	817	1139	1661

Before showing what the rate of increase is, we must observe that the extent of this department's responsibilities was far from constant during these twenty years. The colonial territories were not much altered in area of population between 1935 and 1939. They were considerably diminished by 1943, certain areas being in enemy hands. They were increased again in 1947, but have since then shrunk steadily from year to year as successive colonies achieve self-government. It would be rational to suppose that these changes in the scope of Empire would be reflected in the size of its central administration. But a glance at the figures is enough to convince us that the staff totals represent nothing but so many stages in an inevitable

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increase. And this increase, although related to that observed in other departments, has nothing to do with the size—or even the existence—of the Empire. What are the percentages of increase? We must ignore, for this purpose, the rapid increase in staff which accompanied the diminution of responsibility during World War II. We should note rather, the peacetime rates of increase: over 5.24 per cent between 1935 and 1939, and 6.55 per cent between 1947 and 1954. This gives an average increase of 5.89 per cent each year, a percentage markedly similar to that already found in the Admiralty staff increase between 1914 and 1928.

Further and detailed statistical analysis of departmental staffs would be inappropriate in such a work as this. It is hoped, however, to reach a tentative conclusion regarding the time likely to elapse between a given official's first appointment and the later appointment of his two or more assistants.

Dealing with the problem of pure staff accumulation, all our researches so far completed point to an average increase of 5.75 per cent per year. This fact established, it now becomes possible to state Parkinson's Law in mathematical form: In any public administrative department not actually at war, the staff increase may be expected to follow this formula:

$$x = \frac{2k^m + l}{n}$$

where  $k$  is the number of staff seeking promotion through the appointment of subordinates;  $l$  represents the difference between the ages of appointment and retirement;  $m$  is the number of man-hours devoted to answering minutes within

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the department; and  $n$  is the number of effective units being administered,  $x$  will be the number of new staff required each year. Mathematicians will, of course, realize that to find the percentage increase they must multiply  $x$  by 100 and divide the total of the previous year ( $y$ ), thus:

$$\frac{100(2k^m + l)}{yn} \%$$

And this figure will invariably prove to be between 5.17 per cent and 6.56 per cent, irrespective of any variation in the amount of work (if any) to be done.

The discovery of this formula and of the general principles upon which it is based has, of course, no political value. No attempt has been made to inquire whether departments *ought* to grow in size. Those who hold that this growth is essential to gain full employment are fully entitled to their opinion. Those who doubt the stability of an economy based upon reading each other's minutes are equally entitled to theirs. It would probably be premature to attempt at this stage any inquiry into the quantitative ratio that should exist between the administrators and the administered. Granted, however, that a maximum ratio exists, it should soon be possible to ascertain by formula how many years will elapse before that ratio, in any given community, will be reached. The forecasting of such a result will again have no political value. Nor can it be sufficiently emphasized that Parkinson's Law is a purely scientific discovery, inapplicable except in theory to the politics of the day. It is not the business of the botanist to eradicate the weeds. Enough for him if he can tell us just how fast they grow.

## *HIGH FINANCE*

### *or the Point of Vanishing Interest*

People who understand high finance are of two kinds; those who have vast fortunes of their own and those who have nothing at all. To the actual millionaire a million pounds is something real and comprehensible. To the applied mathematician and the lecturer in economics (assuming both to be practically starving) a million pounds is at least as real as a thousand, they having never possessed either sum. But the world is full of people who fall between these two categories, knowing nothing of millions but well accustomed to think in thousands, and it is of these that finance committees are mostly comprised. The result is a phenomenon that has often been observed but never yet investigated. It might be termed the Law of Triviality. Briefly stated, it means that the time spent on any item of the agenda will be in inverse proportion to the sum involved.

On second thoughts, the statement that this law has never been investigated is not entirely accurate. Some work has actually been done in this field, but the investigators pursued a line of inquiry that led them nowhere. They assumed that the greatest significance should attach to the order in which items of the agenda are taken. They assumed, further, that most of the available time will be



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spent on items one to seven and that the later items will be allowed automatically to pass. The result is well known. The derision with which Dr Guggenheim's lecture was received at the Muttworth Conference may have been thought excessive at the time, but all further discussions on this topic have tended to show that his critics were right. Years had been wasted in a research of which the basic assumptions were wrong. We realize now that position on the agenda is a minor consideration, so far, at least, as this problem is concerned. We consider also that Dr Guggenheim was lucky to escape, as he did, in his underwear. Had he dared to put his lame conclusions before the later conference in September, he would have faced something more than derision. The view would have been taken that he was deliberately wasting time.

If we are to make further progress in this investigation we must ignore all that has so far been done. We must start at the beginning and understand fully the way in which a finance committee actually works. For the sake of the general reader this can be put in dramatic form thus:

*Chairman:* 'We come now to Item Nine. Our Treasurer, Mr McPhail, will report.'

*Mr McPhail:* 'The estimate for the Atomic Reactor is before you, sir, set forth in Appendix H of the sub-committee's report. You will see that the general design and layout has been approved by Professor McFission. The total cost will amount to £10,000,000. The contractors, Messrs McNab and McHash, consider that the work should be complete by April, 1963. Mr McFee, the consulting engi-

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eer, warns us that we should not count on completion before October, at the earliest. In this view he is supported by Dr McHeap, the well-known geophysicist, who refers to the probable need for piling at the lower end of the site. The plan of the main building is before you—see Appendix IX—and the blueprint is laid on the table. I shall be glad to give any further information that members of this committee may require.'

*Chairman:* 'Thank you, Mr McPhail, for your very lucid explanation of the plan as proposed. I will now invite the members present to give us their views.'

It is necessary to pause at this point and consider what views the members are likely to have. Let us suppose that they number eleven, including the Chairman but excluding the Secretary. Of these eleven members, four—including the Chairman—do not know what a reactor is. Of the remainder, three do not know what it is for. Of those who know its purpose, only two have the least idea of what it should cost. One of these is Mr Isaacson, the other is Mr Brickworth. Either is in a position to say something. We may suppose that Mr Isaacson is the first to speak.

*Mr Isaacson:* 'Well, Mr Chairman, I could wish that I felt more confidence in our contractors and consultant. Had we gone to Professor Levi in the first instance, and had the contract been given to Messrs David and Goliath, I should have been happier about the whole scheme. Mr Lyon-Daniels would not have wasted our time with wild guesses about the possible delay in completion, and Dr

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Moses Bullrush would have told us definitely whether piling would be wanted or not.'

*Chairman:* 'I am sure we all appreciate Mr Isaacson's anxiety to complete this work in the best possible way. I feel, however, that it is rather late in the day to call in new technical advisers. I admit that the main contract has still to be signed, but we have already spent very large sums. If we reject the advice for which we have paid, we shall have to pay as much again.'

*(Other members murmur agrcement.)*

*Mr Isaacson:* 'I should like my observation to be minuted.'

*Chairman:* 'Certainly. Perhaps Mr Brickworth also has something to say on this matter?'

Now Mr Brickworth is almost the only man there who knows what he is talking about. There is a great deal he could say. He distrusts that round figure of £10,000,000. Why should it come out to exactly that? Why need they demolish the old building to make room for the new approach? Why is so large a sum set aside for 'contingencies'? And who is McHeap, anyway? Is he the man who was sued last year by the Trickle and Driedup Oil Corporation? But Brickworth does not know where to begin. The other members could not read the blueprint if he referred to it. He would have to begin by explaining what a reactor is and no one there would admit that he did not already know. Better to say nothing.

*Mr Brickworth:* 'I have no comment to make.'

*Chairman:* 'Does any other member wish to speak? Very well. I may take it then that the plans and estimates are



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approved? Thank you. May I now sign the main contract on your behalf? (*Murmur of agreement.*) Thank you. We can now move on to Item Ten.'

Allowing a few seconds for rustling papers and unrolling diagrams, the time spent on Item Nine will have been just two minutes and a half. The meeting is going well. But some members feel uneasy about Item Nine. They wonder inwardly whether they have really been pulling their weight. It is too late to query that reactor scheme, but they would like to demonstrate, before the meeting ends, that they are alive to all that is going on.

*Chairman:* 'Item Ten. Bicycle shed for the use of the clerical staff. An estimate has been received from Messrs Bodger and Woodworm, who undertake to complete the work for the sum of £350. Plans and specification are before you, gentlemen.'

*Mr Softleigh:* 'Surely, Mr Chairman, this sum is excessive, I note that the roof is to be of aluminium. Would not asbestos be cheaper?'

*Mr Holdfast:* 'I agree with Mr Softleigh about the cost, but the roof should, in my opinion, be of galvanized iron. I incline to think that the shed could be built for £300, or even less.'

*Mr Daring:* 'I would go further, Mr Chairman. I question whether this shed is really necessary. We do too much for our staff as it is. They are never satisfied, that is the trouble. They will be wanting garages next.'

*Mr Holdfast:* 'No, I can't support Mr Daring on this

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occasion. I think that the shed is needed. It is a question of material and cost . . .'

The debate is fairly launched. A sum of £350 is well within everybody's comprehension. Everyone can visualize a bicycle shed. Discussion goes on, therefore, for forty-five minutes, with the possible result of saving some £50. Members at length sit back with a feeling of achievement.

*Chairman:* 'Item Eleven. Refreshments supplied at meetings of the Joint Welfare Committee. Monthly, 35s.'

*Mr Sofleigh:* 'What type of refreshment is supplied on these occasions?'

*Chairman:* 'Coffee, I understand.'

*Mr Holdfast:* 'And this means an annual charge of—let me see—£21?'

*Chairman:* 'That is so.'

*Mr Daring:* 'Well, really, Mr Chairman. I question whether this is justified. How long do these meetings last?'

Now begins an even more acrimonious debate. There may be members of the committee who might fail to distinguish between asbestos and galvanized iron, but every man there knows about coffee—what it is, how it should be made, where it should be bought—and whether indeed it should be bought at all. This item on the agenda will occupy the members for an hour and a quarter, and they will end by asking the Secretary to procure further information, leaving the matter to be decided at the next meeting.

### *High Finance*

It would be natural to ask at this point whether a still smaller sum—£10, perhaps, or £5—would occupy the Finance Committee for a proportionately longer time. On this point, it must be admitted, we are still ignorant. Our tentative conclusion must be that there is a point at which the whole tendency is reversed, the committee members concluding that the sum is beneath their notice. Research has still to establish the point at which this reversal occurs. The transition from the £20 debate (an hour and a quarter) to the £10,000,000 debate (two and a half minutes) is indeed an abrupt one. It would be the more interesting to establish the exact point at which it occurs. More than that, it would be of practical value. Supposing, for example, that the point of vanishing interest is represented by the sum of £15, the Treasurer with an item of £26 on the agenda might well decide to present it as two items, one of £14 and the other of £12, with an evident saving in time and effort.

Conclusions at this juncture can be merely tentative, but there is some reason to suppose that the point of vanishing interest represents the sum the individual committee member is willing to lose on a bet or subscribe to a charity. An inquiry on these lines conducted on racecourses and in Methodist chapels, might go far toward solving the problem. Far greater difficulty may be encountered in attempting to discover the exact point at which the sum involved becomes too large to discuss at all. One thing apparent, however, is that the time spent on £10,000,000 and on £10 may well prove to be the same. The present estimated time of two and a half minutes is by no means exact, but there is clearly a space of time—something between two and four

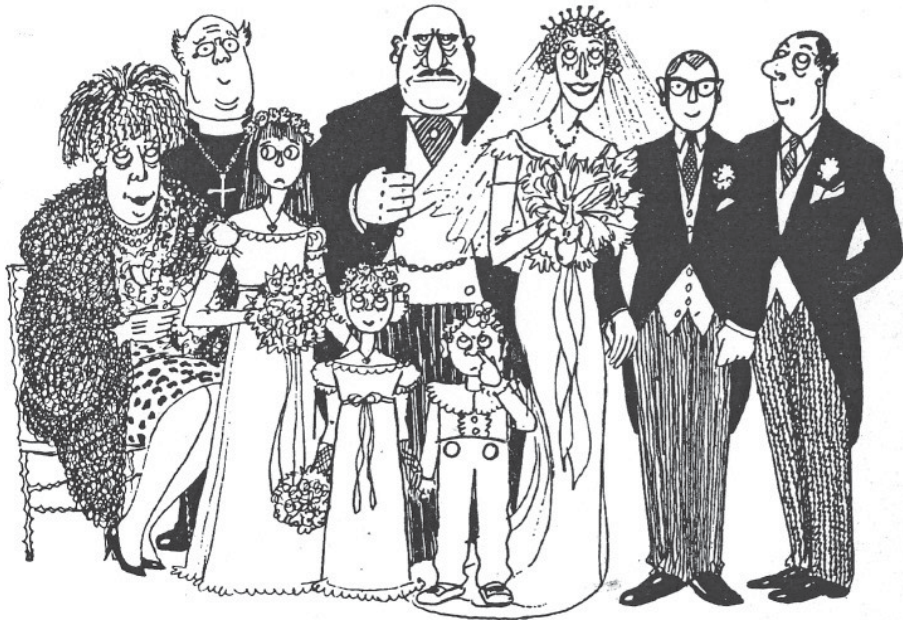
*Parkinson's Law*

and a half minutes—which suffices equally for the largest and the smallest sums.

Much further investigation remains to be done, but the final results, when published, cannot fail to be of absorbing interest and of immediate value to mankind.

# *In-laws & Outlaws*

*Illustrated by Osbert Lancaster*



*C. Northcote*  
**PARKINSON**

**PARKINSON** *In-laws & Outlaws*

*John  
Murray*

# *In-laws & Outlaws*

*Illustrated by Osbert Lancaster*



*C. Northcote*  
**PARKINSON**

## NONORIGINATION

As a young business man you should learn early in life that your advice is of no value to your elders and betters. It is normally futile to approach them with a plan for reorganizing the business, for such a plan implies that it needs reorganizing—the most insulting suggestion one business man can make to another. And even were the suggestion acceptable from anyone, it would not be acceptable from *you*. Who are *you*, a mere deputy assistant, to tell the directors how their business should be run? Submit your memorandum, expecting promotion to result and you will find yourself before the Managing Director but not merely to receive his congratulations.

CHIEF: Reading this memorandum, Mr Reeder, I find myself wondering who is the chief executive here, me or you.

REEDER: You are, sir.

CHIEF: Me? But I evidently know nothing about the business. After thirty years as a manufacturer, I still need guidance (it would seem) from the most junior people in the office. Does this strike you, Mr Reeder, as unusual?

REEDER: Yes, sir; I mean, no, sir.

CHIEF: You think, perhaps, that my methods are out of date?

REEDER: No, sir. Certainly not, sir.

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CHIEF: You realize that I have had years of experience? And you realize that you have had none? But you still think that you know best?

REEDER: Yes—no—I mean yes, sir.

CHIEF: You realize that staff have been sacked for making suggestions only half as insolent as these? Do you expect me to be more lenient with you?

REEDER: No, sir—yes—I mean, no, sir.

CHIEF: (*Gently and quietly*) Merely for your own good, Mr Reeder, I advise you to keep your ideas to yourself until you have more experience. Try to believe that those senior to you know what they are doing. Try to recall that this business was conducted, somehow, before you were born. Try to imagine that it could go on without your help. Try to learn, reflect and consider. In the meanwhile (*suddenly screams*) GET OUT!!

This type of interview does nothing to hasten your promotion or ensure your peace of mind. It is best for that reason to approach the whole matter from a different angle. We shall suppose, for this purpose, that your scheme is perfectly sound and will save the firm half a million each year. In putting it forward, you can have three possible objects. First, you can add to the Company's prosperity. Second, you can gain the reputation of being clever. Third, you can so alter the hierarchy's structure that your own position becomes more important—as, for example, in creating a new post which only you can fill. The first two of these objects you can dismiss at once. The Company's prosperity (unless it is actually tottering) is none of your business. A reputation for cleverness is the last thing you want, nor could it lead to anything but

### *Nonorigination*

trouble. Only the third object could justify your taking action. And there are, even then, two major pitfalls of which you must be aware from the start. In the first place, your motive is likely to be obvious. In the second place, the new vacancy may go to someone else. You will end, if unlucky, with the reputation of an intriguer and of one whose intrigues fall completely flat. This is not the sort of reputation you wish to establish.

How often did it happen during World War II that a Lieutenant-Colonel (General Staff) would produce a re-organization scheme by which a headquarters establishment came to be considerably expanded. Accepting the scheme for which he had pleaded so eloquently, the General would gaze at the new organization chart with the appreciation of a connoisseur.

'Yes, yes, yes,' he would mutter as he adjusted his spectacles. 'A very effective solution to our difficulties. I notice, by the way, that this establishment includes a vacancy for a Brigadier.'

'The upgrading became essential,' the Lieutenant-Colonel would admit with a modest cough. 'It followed from the readjustment of duties at the Grade II level.'

'Just so, just so,' the General would murmur. 'Upgrading becomes inevitable. I shall have to make a recommendation.'

Blushing slightly and glancing downwards the Lieutenant-Colonel would begin to word the letter he would be writing home. 'It came,' he might say, 'as a complete surprise. . . .'

'Yes,' the General would repeat sadistically, 'I shall have to make a recommendation . . . and I know the very man. Brigadier Coldsteel of the First Parachute Division, one of my oldest friends. He comes out of hospital next

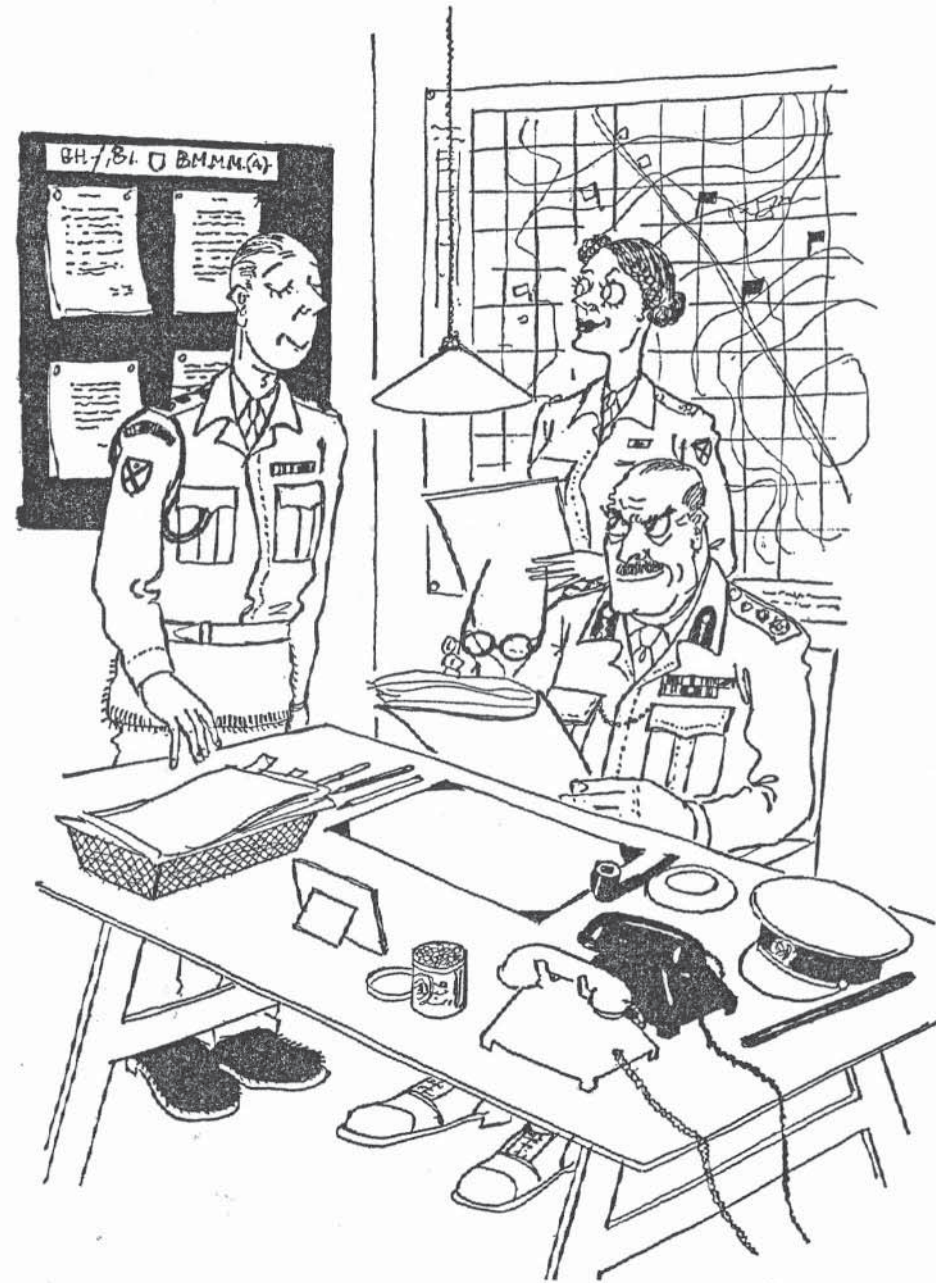


### *In-laws and Outlaws*

week. The very man! (*Telephones*) Get me the base hospital.... All right, I'll hold on....' Turning once more to the Lieutenant-Colonel, he would add, brightly, 'And now I have *another* problem. What am I to do with *you*?'

This is not the sort of situation in which you should place yourself. It is essential, therefore, that any scheme you originate should be put forward by someone else who honestly believes that the idea was his in the first place. Neither praise nor blame need come your way, nor can it be thought that you stooped to intrigue. Of all the administrative techniques there is none, probably, of more importance than the art of having your views put forward by someone else. Towards this desirable result the first step is to choose your stalking-horse. It must be somebody to whom the Managing Director will listen, somebody fairly senior, somebody who is open to suggestion and somebody without too many ideas of his own. There is such a man in every organization and we shall call him Harry Bumbling. He is a keen member of the Golf Club and it is there that you will push your acquaintance. Your attitude from the start must be one of humble admiration. 'I wish I had your knowledge of the business,' you will sigh. 'It must take years of experience to develop your sureness of judgement!' 'How strange,' you will protest, 'that a man of your seniority should retain so youthful and fresh an outlook!' Before long you will be able to insist on his daring and original ideas. 'There is no one but you who could have thought of that, Harry. We all know by now where the Managing Director gets his ideas!'

Having established a relationship as of master and disciple you wait for the next occasion of festivity and



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waylay Harry Bumbling in the Cloakroom. You need to be rather more sober than he is.

'Gosh, Harry, this scheme of yours for making K Division a separate Company—I think that's a wonderful idea!'

'What scheme?'

'Mike has just told me about it. In strict confidence, mind you. And do you know what I said?'

'How could I? I wasn't there, was I?'

'Well, I said to him, "Mike," I said, "that man's a genius!" Did I mean it? I'll say I meant it.'

'You meant what?'

'I meant it when I called you a genius.'

'Why?'

'Because of your scheme for K Division.'

'What scheme?'

'For making K Division a separate company—Mike told me about it.'

'Who is Mike?'

'Mike Bablock. But I realize it's secret and he shouldn't have told me.'

'Of course it's secret. Why can't he keep his mouth shut?'

'He *does* talk too much. But the scheme is splendid. The most astute idea I ever heard—from the tax angle alone—yes, Harry, a stroke of genius!'

'What is?'

'Your scheme for K Division.'

'Oh, that. But keep it under your hat.'

'Strictly between ourselves. Let's have a drink.'

'Good idea. A brainwave!'

'No, you're the man for brainwaves. The rest of us are not in the running.'

### *In-laws and Outlaws*

'Who said I was running?'

'I never said you were—Oh, never mind. Let's go and drink to your scheme.'

'What scheme?'

If you handle the matter correctly, old Bumbling will emerge from the party with a vague idea of having discussed something of momentous importance with somebody. Next day he will wonder what he discussed with whom. It will be for you to remind him and preferably over the telephone. This will set the rumours going from the Head-office switchboard.

'That you, Harry? I think I should tell you there has been some leakage about your scheme for K Division—the idea we were discussing last night. Everyone is talking about it. They all think it quite brilliant.'

'Brilliant? Oh, I wouldn't say that. Basically quite a simple idea.'

'A simple idea which occurred to no one else! Actually it was the application of the scheme which impressed me even more. You have the thing worked out to the last detail?'

'Have I? Well, I mean, it doesn't do to be vague.'

'I was so impressed, Harry, that I made some notes as soon as I got home. I hope they are an accurate account of what you had in mind.'

'Perhaps you had better send them over for me to check.'

'I'll do that right away. Another thing though. Two difficulties occur to me. You will know the answers, I'm sure, but I feel bound to point them out. Would you be interested?'

'Yes I should. Let's meet for lunch. At 12.30 in the County Club.'

### *Nonorigination*

'Thanks very much. That will be fine. It's very good of you to discuss Company policy with me. Junior as I am, I can contribute nothing. But I am keen to learn.'

'Glad to give you any guidance I can. At 12.30 then. Goodbye.'

The arrival of your notes, incoherent as they may be, will solve Bumbling's main problem for him. He will know what it is he is supposed to have suggested. There will be nothing particularly clever about it but nothing manifestly unreasonable. There will be several inaccuracies in your notes and he will automatically correct them. At least one word will be misspelt, over which he can smile. 'These young fellows don't know everything!' He will see at a glance how things could be put into shape and paragraphed properly. Not a bad scheme, though. With each pencilled correction, he will be accepting responsibility for it. With each improvement the idea will become more definitely his.

Over lunch you will raise your two objections. These must be prepared with considerable care. Although just plausible enough to arouse interest, they must admit of a quick and final answer. One could be a point in law, something about Company registration in Northern Ireland. 'But the new Company', says Bumbling, 'will be registered in Canada!' 'But of course!' you will exclaim. 'How stupid of me to forget that!' Your second objection can be a little more difficult, something about raising the capital for expansion, investors no longer having the security offered by the Group as a whole. This will be another skittle to knock down, probably at the second shot. The object of this manoeuvre is to give Bumbling the sensation of victory. He has overridden two objections to

### *In-laws and Outlaws*

his scheme. Who will oppose him next? A further object is to dispel any lurking suspicion that the whole idea is really yours. Why, the stupid young fellow was against it at first—could do nothing but think up difficulties! Very helpful since, mind you, and worked hard over the scheme in its later stages. Under good direction, might be a useful Assistant-Manager. Not too much initiative as yet, but that may be a good fault. There is nothing more intolerable than a young man who thinks he can run the Company. Young Reeder knows his place—that is something in his favour. Originality may come with more experience. He might have a future—who knows?—as Manager. Yes, a useful man.

So the originator of the scheme receives none of the applause? None at all. He must reject from the outset the least suggestion that the idea came from anyone but Bumbling. This is in accordance with a general principle of administration. Always have your ideas put forward by someone else. The man in control of the committee is often the man who says nothing. Pursue the opposite policy, advocating a scheme and expecting to gain credit by its adoption and you may well succeed—just once. By that one success you will have created the opposition to anything else you may propose. With the reputation of being too clever by half, you will be side-tracked into work of lessening importance. Your career, at least in the Company which you first joined, will end before it has begun. Your only policy will be to start afresh, having read this book, and make a different impression on a different group of people. In the new firm to which you have transferred there may well be someone to whom the Managing Director will listen, somebody fairly senior, somebody who is open to suggestion and somebody with-

### *Nonorigination*

out too many ideas of his own. He is a keen member, as it happens, of the Golf Club and it is there that you will meet. Your attitude from the start will be one of humble admiration. . . . You may know nothing of the business but you will know something, by now, about human nature.