BOOK REVIEWS

Who will Call the Tune?

The Dilemma of Accountability in Modern Government: Independence versus Control. Edited by Bruce L. R. Smith and D. C. Hague. Pp. xviii + 391. (Macmillan: London, February 1971.) £4.50.

THIS is a pioneer book, important enough to have been written in simpler English for a wider audience. It consists of two lengthy comments by Professor Douglas Hague, of Manchester University, and Professor Bruce Smith, of Columbia University, and of the working papers of a Ditchley conference, held in March 1969, to consider "a new phenomenon in the art of government"—the problems of accountability and independence.

Alan Pifer, president of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, had for some time been concerned with the growing practice of federal government to devolve responsibility to private organizations on a contractual basis. But certain questions remained unanswered: what were the public benefits of this practice; what did it contribute to the financial viability of private institutions; above all, what were the anatomical characteristics of the new quasi-non-governmental sector?

From England, David Howell, MP, now parliamentary secretary for the Civil Service, drew his attention to a more basic aspect: how could government respond effectively to the speed of change, and remain accountable to the electorate? That was in 1967. There followed the setting up of parallel study groups in the US and the UK; these met at Ditchley, of which get-together this book is the product. A second book based on further work is promised. This is necessary, because what is missing is a coordinating principle, a central hypothesis which will see the phenomena it deals with as parts of a whole.

For Professor Smith, so extensive is the use of "administration by contract", especially in the US, that the modern state may be described also as "the contract state". British interest was not as broad. It was concerned chiefly with how to combine accountability with independence in the nationalized industries. Both groups began to put more emphasis on the quasi-non-governmental organization (Qngo), and less on contracting with the private sector.

For the British participants, says Professor Hague, there came a revelation. Mrs Fanny Mitchell, under the direction of Professor W. J. Mackenzie, of Glasgow, has drawn up a list of more than 700

Qngos in Britain. They include the Law Commission, Bank of England, Regional Hospital Boards, Gas Council, General Medical Council, BBC and the like. Classification is not easy.

The Qngos receive an impressive sum of money annually from Government. From the 1969/70 estimates, £350 millions for grants; a similar sum for grants-in-aid (which means money left over at the end of the year does not have to be returned to the Treasury); and £65 millions for research and development. It is difficult to separate out exactly the total of monies going to the Qngos, but clearly the sum involved is large.

Why have the Qngos come into existence? Six reasons are suggested: to protect certain activities from political interference; to escape the weaknesses of bureaucratic rule by government departments; to make sure the right talent is engaged on the right tasks; to spread power by having more centres of responsibility; to provide an administrative "back double" to get things done outside the existing structure; to beat the "too-many-civil-servants" criticism.

Four kinds of accountability are distinguished: programme, process, fiscal, and social. This last was construed as responsibility to society. Sir Brian Flowers, chairman of the Science Research Council, gave as example the question of whether SRC scientific judgments were good. This was a sort of social accountability. "The scientific community, as the representatives of the public, was asking whether the judgments made were the right ones." I regard this as a most unsatisfactory example. The scientific community does not represent the public. Neither Sir Brian nor his colleagues—worthy though they are—are elected: they are appointed. They represent an establishment, or a special pressure group.

This links up with the question of independence. The Ditchley conference feeling was to see independence as a means to an end: Qngos would perform better if they had greater independence. Sir Brian suggested that Government departments would be incompetent in running research laboratories or research organizations directly. This is an interesting statement in view of the turmoil now on in Britain in an attempt to redefine the role of research councils, and the laboratories they control. In fact, many Qngos—under prodding by Government—are diversifying most successfully the laboratories they control.

Now that nationalized industries are

being pushed back, in part, into the private sector, the problems of accountability and independence are highly important. The criteria to judge the performance of Qngos need clear definition, especially as Ministers seem to differ in the extent to which they believe they may exert pressures. Attention has been drawn (see Maurice Corina in *The Times*, April 26, 1971) to the contradictory aspects, for instance, of two statements made at the October 1970 annual Conservative Party conference. Mr John Davies, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, promised the "disengagement" of nationalized industries from excessive Governmental control; Mr Chris Chataway outlined his firm handling of the Post Office Corporation. Mr Corina concludes: "The Post Office can be faulted on many issues. But a fair share of responsibility must be allocated to the continuing confusion between the aims of Ministerial and Parliamentary control and the pursuit of commercial objectives."

I have an unhappy feeling that a Qngo is really an attempt to remove a problem that should concern Parliament directly from its context, to make it not a democratic construct, but to give it a reality in its own right: logically, then, Parliamentary democracy is required to adjust itself to that reality. What develops—to borrow a phrase from Thomas Mann—is "power-protected intimacy". This is not good for democratic behaviour. A Qngo is then rather like the psychiatrist defined as a doctor who hates the sight of blood.

It's a pity that neither the British nor the American study groups contain a representative of the civil service unions. Also, I'd like to see a statement on the problem of the Qngo in a developing country.

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Early Cultivation

The First European Agriculture: a Study of the Osteological and Botanical Evidence until Two Thousand BC. By Jacqueline Murray. Pp. vii + 380. (Edinburgh University: Edinburgh, January 1971.) £3.00.

IN recent decades it has become standard archaeological practice to treat osteological material with the same care that is devoted to artefacts. Botanical material, though less obvious to the excavator and sometimes needing special sampling, is