

up. If all the injustice it has committed and all the misery it has caused could only be locked up with it, and the whole burnt away in a great funeral pyre—why so much the better for other parties than the parties in Jarndyce and Jarndyce!

BUREAUCRACY

Franz Kafka

From *The Castle*

K. soon found his opinion of the authorities of the place confirmed when he went to see the Mayor. The Mayor, a kindly, stout, clean-shaven man, was laid up; he was suffering from a severe attack of gout, and received K. in bed. "So here is our Land-Surveyor," he said, and tried to sit up, failed in the attempt, and flung himself back again on the cushions, pointing apologetically to his leg. ^{elapses} In the faint light of the room, where the tiny windows were still further darkened by curtains, a noiseless, almost shadowy woman pushed forward a chair for K. and placed it beside the bed. "Take a seat, Land-Surveyor, take a seat," said the Mayor, "and let me know your wishes." K. read out Klamm's letter and adjoined a few remarks to it. Again he had this sense of extraordinary ease in intercourse with the authorities. They seemed literally to bear every burden, one could lay everything on their shoulders and remain free and untouched oneself. As if he too felt this in his way, the Mayor made a movement of discomfort on the bed. At length he said: "I know about the whole business, as, indeed, you have remarked. The reason why I've done nothing is, first, that I've been unwell, and secondly that you've been so long in coming: I thought finally that you had given up the business. But now that you've been so kind as to look me up, really I must tell you the plain unvarnished truth of the matter. You've been taken on as Land-Surveyor, as you say, but, unfortunately, we have no need of a land-surveyor. There wouldn't be the least use for one here. The frontiers

of our little state are marked out and all officially recorded. So what should we do with a land-surveyor?" Though he had not given the matter a moment's thought before, K. was convinced now at the bottom of his heart that he had expected some such response as this. Exactly for that reason he was able to reply immediately: "This is a great surprise for me. It throws all my calculations out. I can only hope that there's some misunderstanding." "No, unfortunately," said the Mayor, "it's as I've said." "But how is that possible?" cried K. "Surely I haven't made this endless journey just to be sent back again!" "That's another question," replied the Mayor, "which isn't for me to decide, but how this misunderstanding became possible, I can certainly explain that. In such a large governmental office as the Count's, it may occasionally happen that one department ordains this, another that; neither knows of the other, and though the supreme control is absolutely efficient, it comes by its nature too late, and so every now and then a trifling miscalculation arises. Of course that applies only to the pettiest little affairs, as for example your case. In great matters I've never known of any error yet, but even little affairs are often painful enough. Now as for your case, I'll be open with you about its history, and make no official mystery of it—I'm not enough of the official for that, I'm a farmer and always will remain one. A long time ago—I had only been Mayor for a few months—there came an order, I can't remember from what department, in which, in the usual categorical way of the gentlemen up there, it was made known that a Land-Surveyor was to be called in, and the municipality were instructed to hold themselves ready for the plans and measurements necessary for his work. This order obviously couldn't have concerned you, for it was many years ago, and I shouldn't have remembered it if I wasn't ill just now and with ample time in bed to think of the most absurd things. Mizzi," he said, suddenly interrupting his narrative, to the woman who was still flitting about the room in incomprehensible activity, "please have a look in the cabinet, perhaps you'll find the order. You see, it belongs to my first months here," he explained to K.; "at that time I still filed everything away." The woman opened the cabinet at once. K. and the Mayor looked on. The cabinet was crammed full of papers. When it was opened two large packages of papers rolled out, tied in round bundles, as one usually binds firewood; the woman sprang back in alarm. "It must be down below, at the bottom," said the Mayor, directing operations from the bed. Gathering the papers in both arms, the woman obediently threw them all out

Disorganization in bureaucracy

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of the cabinet so as to reach those at the bottom. The papers now covered half the floor. "A great deal of work is got through here," said the Mayor nodding his head, "and that's only a small fraction of it. I've put away the most important pile in the shed, but the great mass of it has simply gone astray. Who could keep it all together? But there are piles and piles more in the shed. Will you be able to find the order?" he said turning again to his wife, "you must look for a document with the word 'Land-Surveyor' underlined in blue pencil." "It's too dark," said the woman, "I'll get a candle," and she stamped through the papers to the door. "My wife is a great help to me," said the Mayor, "in these difficult official affairs, and yet we can never quite keep up with them. True, I have another assistant for the writing that has to be done, the teacher; but all the same it's impossible to get things shipshape, there's always a lot of business that has to be left lying; it has been put away in that chest there," and he pointed to another cabinet. "And just now, when I'm laid up, it has got the upper hand," he said, and lay back with a weary, yet proud air. "Couldn't I," asked K., seeing that the woman had now returned with the candle and was kneeling before the chest looking for the paper, "couldn't I help your wife to look for it?" The Mayor smilingly shook his head: "As I said before, I don't want to make any parade of official secrecy before you; but to let you look through these papers yourself—no, I can't go so far as that." Now stillness fell in the room, only the rustling of the papers was to be heard; it looked, indeed, for a few minutes, as if the Mayor were dozing. A faint rapping on the door made K. turn round. It was of course the assistants. All the same, they showed already some of the effects of their training, they did not rush at once into the room, but whispered at first through the door, which was slightly ajar: "It's cold out here." "Who's that?" asked the Mayor, starting up. "It's only my assistants," replied K. "I don't know where to ask them to wait for me; it's too cold outside, and here they would be in the way." "They won't disturb me," said the Mayor indulgently. "Ask them to come in. Besides, I know them. Old acquaintances." "But they're in *my* way," K. replied bluntly, letting his gaze wander from the assistants to the Mayor and back again, and finding on the faces of all three the same smile. "But seeing you're here," he went on experimentally, "stay and help the Mayor's lady there to look for a document with the word 'Land-Surveyor' underlined in blue pencil." The Mayor raised no objection. What had not been permitted to K. was allowed to the assist-

ants; they threw themselves at once on the papers, but they did not so much seek for anything as rummage about in the heap, and while one was spelling out a document, the other would immediately snatch it out of his hand. The woman meanwhile knelt before the empty chest, she seemed to have completely given up looking; in any case the candle was standing quite far away from her.

"The assistants," said the Mayor with a self-complacent smile, which seemed to indicate that he had the lead, though nobody was in a position even to assume this, "they're in your way, then? Yet they're your own assistants." "No," replied K. coolly, "they only ran into me here." "Ran into you," said the Mayor; "you mean, of course, were assigned to you." "All right, then, were assigned to me," said K., "but they might as well have fallen from the sky, for all the thought that was spent in choosing them." "Nothing here is done without taking thought," said the Mayor, actually forgetting the pain in his foot and sitting up. "Nothing!" said K., "and what about me being summoned here, then?" "Even your being summoned was carefully considered," said the Mayor; "it was only certain auxiliary circumstances that entered and confused the matter, I'll prove it to you from the official papers." "The papers will not be found," said K. "Not be found?" said the Mayor. "Mizzi, please hurry up a bit. Still, I can tell you the story even without the papers. We replied with thanks to the order that I've mentioned already, saying that we didn't need a land-surveyor. But this reply doesn't appear to have reached the original department—I'll call it A—but by mistake went to another department, B. So Department A remained without an answer, but unfortunately our full reply didn't reach B either; whether it was that the order itself was not enclosed by us, or whether it got lost on the way—it was certainly not lost in my department, that I can vouch for—in any case all that arrived at Department B was the covering letter, in which was merely noted that the enclosed order, unfortunately an impractical one, was concerned with the engagement of a land-surveyor. Meanwhile Department A was waiting for our answer; they had, of course, made a memorandum of the case, but as, excusably enough, often happens and is bound to happen even under the most efficient handling, our correspondent trusted to the fact that we would answer him, after which he would either summon the Land-Surveyor or else, if need be, write us further about the matter. As a result he never thought of referring to his memorandum, and the whole thing fell into oblivion. But in Department B the covering letter came into the hands

of a correspondent famed for his conscientiousness, Sordini by name, an Italian; it is incomprehensible even to me, though I am one of the initiated, why a man of his capacities is left in an almost subordinate position. This Sordini naturally sent us back the unaccompanied covering letter for completion. Now months, if not years, had passed by this time since that first communication from Department A, which is understandable enough, for when—as is the rule—a document goes the proper route, it reaches the department at the outside in a day and is settled that day, but when it once in a while loses its way, then in an organization so efficient as ours its proper destination must be sought for literally with desperation; otherwise it mightn't be found; and then—well, then the search may last really for a long time. Accordingly, when we got Sordini's note we had only a vague memory of the affair; there were only two of us to do the work at that time, Mizzi and myself, the teacher hadn't yet been assigned to us; we only kept copies in the most important instances, so we could only reply in the most vague terms that we knew nothing of this engagement of a land-surveyor and that as far as we knew there was no need for one.

"But—here the Mayor interrupted himself as if, carried on by his tale, he had gone too far, or as if at least it was possible that he had gone too far, "doesn't the story bore you?"

"No," said K., "it amuses me."

Thereupon the Mayor said: "I'm not telling it to amuse you."

"It only amuses me," said K., "because it gives me an insight into the ludicrous bungling that in certain circumstances may decide the life of a human being."

"You haven't been given any insight into that yet," replied the Mayor gravely, "and I can go on with my story. Naturally Sordini was not satisfied with our reply. I admire the man, though he is a plague to me. He literally distrusts everyone; even if, for instance, he has come to know somebody, through countless circumstances, as the most reliable man in the world, he distrusts him as soon as fresh circumstances arise, as if he didn't want to know him, or rather as if he wanted to know that he was a scoundrel. I consider that right and proper, an official must behave like that; unfortunately, with my nature I can't follow out this principle; you see yourself how frank I am with you, a stranger, about those things, I can't act in any other way. But Sordini, on the contrary, was seized by suspicion when he read our reply. Now a huge correspondence began to grow. Sordini inquired how I had suddenly recalled that a land-surveyor shouldn't

be summoned. I replied, drawing on Mizzi's splendid memory, that the first suggestion had come from the bureau itself (but that it had come from a different department we had of course forgotten long before this). Sordini countered: why had I only mentioned this official order now? I replied: because I had just remembered it. Sordini: that was very extraordinary. Myself: it was not in the least extraordinary in such a long-drawn-out business. Sordini: yes, it was extraordinary, for the order that I remembered didn't exist. Myself: of course it didn't exist, for the whole document had been lost. Sordini: but there must be a memorandum extant relating to this first communication, and there wasn't one extant. That made me halt, for that an error should happen in Sordini's department I dared neither maintain nor believe. Perhaps, my dear Land-Surveyor, you'll make the reproach against Sordini in your mind that in consideration of my assertion he should have been moved at least to make inquiries in the other departments about the affair. But that is just what would have been wrong; I don't want any blame to attach to this man, no, not even in your thoughts. It's a working principle of the head bureau that the very possibility of error must be ruled out of account. This ground principle is justified by the consummate organization of the whole authority, and it is necessary if the maximum speed in transacting business is to be attained. So it wasn't within Sordini's power to make inquiries in other departments; besides, they simply wouldn't have answered, because they would have guessed at once that it was a case of hunting out a possible error."

"Allow me, Mr. Mayor, to interrupt you with a question," said K. "Did you not mention once before a Control Authority? From your description the whole economy is one that would rouse one's apprehensions if one could imagine the Control failing."

"You're very strict," said the Mayor, "but multiply your strictness a thousand times and it would still be nothing compared with the strictness that the Authority imposes on itself. Only a total stranger could ask a question like yours. Is there a Control Authority? There are only Control authorities. Frankly, it isn't their function to hunt out errors in the vulgar sense, for errors don't happen, and even when once in a while an error does happen, as in your case, who can say finally that it's an error?"

"This is news indeed!" cried K.

"It's very old news to me," said the Mayor. "Not unlike yourself, I'm convinced that an error has occurred, and as a result Sordini is

quite ill with despair, and the first Control officials, whom we have to thank for discovering the source of error, recognize that there is an error. But who can guarantee that the second Control officials will decide in the same way, and the third and all the others?"

"That may be," said K. "I would much rather not mix in these speculations yet; besides, this is the first mention I've heard of those Control officials and naturally I can't understand them yet. But I fancy that two things must be distinguished here: first, what is transacted in the offices and can be construed again officially this way or that, and, secondly, my own actual person, me myself, situated outside of the offices and threatened by their encroachments, which are so meaningless that I can't even yet believe in the seriousness of the danger. The first evidently is covered by what you, Mr. Mayor, tell me in such extraordinary and disconcerting detail; all the same, I should like to hear a word now about myself."

"I'm coming to that too," said the Mayor, "but you couldn't understand it without my giving a few more preliminary details. My mentioning the Control officials just now was premature. So I must turn back to the discrepancies with Sordini. As I said, my defense gradually weakened. But whenever Sordini has in his hands even the slightest hold against anyone, he has as good as won, for then his vigilance, energy, and alertness are actually increased and it's a terrible moment for the victim, and a glorious one for the victim's enemies. It's only because in other circumstances I have experienced this last feeling that I'm able to speak of him as I do. All the same, I have never managed yet to come within sight of him. He can't get down here, he's so overwhelmed with work; from the descriptions I've heard of his room, every wall is covered with pillars of documents tied together, piled on top of one another; those are only the documents that Sordini is working on at the time, and as bundles of papers are continually being taken away and brought in, and all in great haste; those columns are always falling on the floor, and it's just those perpetual crashes, following fast on one another, that have come to distinguish Sordini's workroom. Yes, Sordini is a worker, and he gives the same scrupulous care to the smallest case as to the greatest."

"Mr. Mayor," said K., "you always call my case one of the smallest, and yet it has given hosts of officials a great deal of trouble, and if, perhaps, it was unimportant at the start, yet through the diligence of officials of Sordini's type it has grown into a great affair. Very much against my will, unfortunately, for my ambition doesn't

run to seeing columns of documents, all about me, rising and crashing together, but to working quietly at my drawing-board as a humble land-surveyor."

"No," said the Superintendent, "it's not at all a great affair, in that respect you've no ground for complaint—it's one of the least important among the least important. The importance of a case is not determined by the amount of work it involves; you're far from understanding the authorities if you believe that. But even if it's a question of the amount of work, your case would remain one of the slightest; ordinary cases—those without any so-called errors, I mean—provide far more work and far more profitable work as well. Besides, you know absolutely nothing yet of the actual work that was caused by your case. I'll tell you about that now. . . ."

PARLIAMENTARY CRETINISM

Anthony Trollope

From *Phineas Redux*

Before the 11th of November, the day on which Parliament was to meet, the whole country was in a hubbub. Consternation and triumph were perhaps equally predominant, and equally strong. There were those who declared that now at length was Great Britain to be ruined in actual present truth; and those who asserted that, of a sudden, after a fashion so wholly unexpected as to be divine,—as great fires, great famines, and great wars are called divine,—a mighty hand had been stretched out to take away the remaining incubus of superstition, priestcraft, and bigotry under which England had hitherto been labouring. The proposed disestablishment of the State Church of England was, of course, the subject of this diversity of opinion.

And there was not only diversity, but with it great confusion. The political feelings of the country are, as a rule, so well marked that it is easy, as to almost every question, to separate the sheep from the goats. With but few exceptions one can tell where to look

for the support of another. More or to combat about. But not the accredited the bill, but own party, opposed to the but be certain the Conserva own bosom of such private would not, probably ne might be wor more absolut those great n them both. staunch Com come of it to cold shade Household S hardly have the Conserva to their own ous disruption two,—took th as to create t with affected used to this England mus against the c foolish, and n wise remain no good wo foes did, wh they could o believed to b abstain. Each hiding his fac once exist in