



The Peter Principle



Laurence J. Peter
Raymond Hull

Why Things Always Go Wrong

Laurence J. Peter
&
Raymond Hull

**The Peter
Principle**

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*This book is dedicated to all those who,
working, playing, loving, living and
dying at their Level of Incompetence,
provided the data for the founding and
development of the salutary science of
Hierarchiology.*

They saved others: themselves they could not save.

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Introduction

by RAYMOND HULL

AS AN author and journalist, I have had exceptional opportunities to study the workings of civilized society. I have investigated and written about government, industry, business, education and the arts. I have talked to, and listened carefully to, members of many trades and professions, people of lofty, middling and lowly stations.

I have noticed that, with few exceptions, men bungle their affairs. Everywhere I see incompetence rampant, incompetence triumphant.

I have seen a three-quarter-mile-long highway bridge collapse and fall into the sea because, despite checks and double-checks, someone had botched the design of a supporting pier.

I have seen town planners supervising the development of a city on the flood plain of a great river, where it is certain to be periodically inundated.

Lately I read about the collapse of three giant cooling towers at a British power-station: they cost a million dollars each, but were not strong enough to withstand a good blow of wind.

I noted with interest that the indoor baseball stadium at Houston, Texas, was found on completion to be peculiarly ill-suited to baseball: on bright days, fielders could not see fly balls against the glare of the skylights.

I observe that appliance manufacturers, as regular policy,

establish regional service depots in the expectation—justified by experience—that many of their machines will break down during the warranty period.

Having listened to umpteen motorists' complaints about faults in their new cars, I was not surprised to learn that roughly one-fifth of the automobiles produced by major manufacturers in recent years have been found to contain potentially dangerous production defects.

Please do not assume that I am a jaundiced ultra-conservative, crying down contemporary men and things just because they are contemporary. Incompetence knows no barriers of time or place.

Macaulay gives a picture, drawn from a report by Samuel Pepys, of the British navy in 1684. "The naval administration was a prodigy of wastefulness, corruption, ignorance, and indolence . . . no estimate could be trusted . . . no



In the expectation that many of their machines will break down during the warranty period.

contract was performed . . . no check was enforced. . . . Some of the new men of war were so rotten that, unless speedily repaired, they would go down at their moorings. The sailors were paid with so little punctuality that they were glad to find some usurer who would purchase their tickets at forty percent discount. Most of the ships which were afloat were commanded by men who had not been bred to the sea."

Wellington, examining the roster of officers assigned to him for the 1810 campaign in Portugal, said, "I only hope that when the enemy reads the list of their names, he trembles as I do."

Civil War General Richard Taylor, speaking of the Battle of the Seven Days, remarked, "Confederate commanders knew no more about the topography . . . within a day's march of the city of Richmond than they did about Central Africa."

Robert E. Lee once complained bitterly, "I cannot have my orders carried out."

For most of World War II the British armed forces fought with explosives much inferior, weight for weight, to those in German shells and bombs. Early in 1940, British scientists knew that the cheap, simple addition of a little powdered aluminum would double the power of existing explosives, yet the knowledge was not applied till late in 1943.

In the same war, the Australian commander of a hospital ship checked the vessel's water tanks after a refit and found them painted inside with red lead. It would have poisoned every man aboard.

These things—and hundreds more like them—I have seen and read about and heard about. I have accepted the universality of incompetence.

I have stopped being surprised when a moon rocket fails to get off the ground because something is forgotten, something breaks, something doesn't work, or something explodes prematurely.

I am no longer amazed to observe that a government-employed marriage counselor is a homosexual.

I now expect that statesmen will prove incompetent to fulfill their campaign pledges. I assume that if they do anything, it will probably be to carry out the pledges of their opponents.

This incompetence would be annoying enough if it were confined to public works, politics, space travel and such vast, remote fields of human endeavor. But it is not. It is close at hand, too—an ever-present, pestiferous nuisance.

As I write this page, the woman in the next apartment is talking on the telephone. I can hear every word she says. It is 10 P.M. and the man in the apartment on the other side of me has gone to bed early with a cold. I hear his intermittent cough. When he turns on his bed I hear the springs squeak. I don't live in a cheap rooming house: this is an expensive, modern, concrete high-rise apartment block. What's the matter with the people who designed and built it?

The other day a friend of mine bought a hacksaw, took it home and began to cut an iron bolt. At his second stroke, the saw blade snapped, and the adjustable joint of the frame broke so that it could not be used again.

Last week I wanted to use a tape recorder on the stage of a new high-school auditorium. I could get no power for the machine. The building engineer told me that, in a year's occupancy, he had been unable to find a switch that would turn on current in the base plugs on stage. He was beginning to think they were not wired up at all.

This morning I set out to buy a desk lamp. In a large furniture and appliance store I found a lamp that I liked. The salesman was going to wrap it, but I asked him to test it first. (I'm getting cautious nowadays.) He was obviously unused to testing electrical equipment, because it took him a long time to find a socket. Eventually he plugged the lamp in, then could not switch it on! He tried another lamp of the same style: that would not switch on, either. The whole consignment had defective switches. I left.

I recently ordered six hundred square feet of fiber glass insulation for a cottage I am renovating. I stood over the clerk at the order desk to make sure she got the quantity right. In vain! The building supply firm billed me for seven hundred square feet, and delivered nine hundred square feet!

Education, often touted as a cure for all ills, is apparently no cure for incompetence. Incompetence runs riot in the halls of education. One high-school graduate in three cannot read at normal fifth-grade level. It is now commonplace for colleges to be giving reading lessons to freshmen. In some colleges, *twenty percent* of freshmen cannot read well enough to understand their textbooks!

I receive mail from a large university. Fifteen months ago I changed my address. I sent the usual notice to the university: my mail kept going to the old address. After two more change-of-address notices and a phone call, I made a personal visit. I pointed with my finger to the wrong address in their records, dictated the new address and watched a secretary take it down. The mail still went to the old address. Two days ago there was a new development. I received a phone call from the woman who had succeeded me in my old apartment and who, of course, had been receiving my

mail from the university. She herself has just moved again, and my mail from the university has now started going to *her* new address!

As I said, I became resigned to this omnipresent incompetence. Yet I thought that, if only its cause could be discovered, then a cure might be found. So I began asking questions.

I heard plenty of theories.

A banker blamed the schools: "Kids nowadays don't learn efficient work habits."

A teacher blamed politicians: "With such inefficiency at the seat of government, what can you expect from citizens? Besides, they resist our legitimate demands for adequate education budgets. If only we could get a computer in every school. . . ."

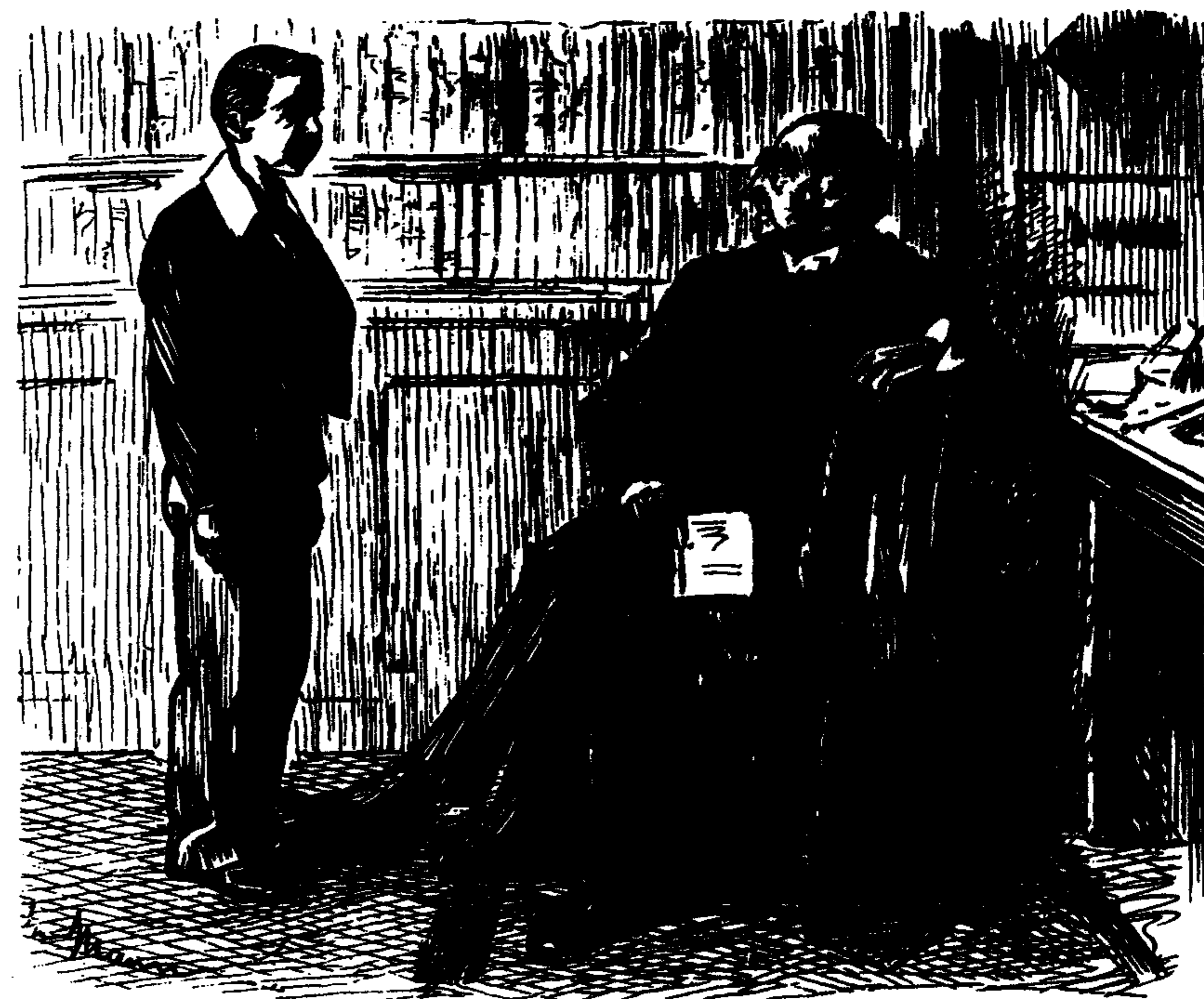
An atheist blamed the churches: ". . . drugging the people's minds with fables of a better world, and distracting them from practicalities."

A churchman blamed radio, television and movies: ". . . many distractions of modern life have drawn people away from the moral teachings of the church."

A trade unionist blamed management: ". . . too greedy to pay a living wage. A man can't take any interest in his job on this starvation pay."

A manager blamed unions: "The worker just doesn't care nowadays—thinks of nothing but raises, vacations and retirement pensions."

An individualist said that welfare-statism produces a general don't-care attitude. A social worker told me that moral laxity in the home and family breakdown produces irresponsibility on the job. A psychologist said that early repression of sexual impulses causes a subconscious desire to fail, as



Early repression of sexual impulses causes a subconscious desire to fail.

atonement for guilt feelings. A philosopher said, "Men are human; accidents will happen."

A multitude of different explanations is as bad as no explanation at all. I began to feel that I would never understand incompetence.

Then one evening, in a theatre lobby, during the second intermission of a dully performed play, I was grumbling about incompetent actors and directors, and got into conversation with Dr. Laurence J. Peter, a scientist who had devoted many years to the study of incompetence.

The intermission was too short for him to do more than whet my curiosity. After the show I went to his home and sat till 3:00 A.M. listening to his lucid, startlingly original

exposition of a theory that at last answered my question, "Why incompetence?"

Dr. Peter exonerated Adam, agitators and accident, and arraigned one feature of our society as the perpetrator and rewarder of incompetence.

Incompetence explained! My mind flamed at the thought. Perhaps the next step might be incompetence eradicated!

With characteristic modesty, Dr. Peter had so far been satisfied to discuss his discovery with a few friends and colleagues and give an occasional lecture on his research. His vast collection of incompetenciana, his brilliant galaxy of incompetence theories and formulae, had never appeared in print.

"Possibly my Principle could benefit mankind," said Peter. "But I'm frantically busy with routine teaching and the associated paperwork; then there are faculty committee meetings, and my continuing research. Some day I may sort out the material and arrange it for publication, but for the next ten or fifteen years I simply won't have time."

I stressed the danger of procrastination and at last Dr. Peter agreed to a collaboration: he would place his extensive research reports and huge manuscript at my disposal; I would condense them into a book. The following pages present Professor Peter's explanation of his Principle, the most penetrating social and psychological discovery of the century.

Dare you read it?

Dare you face, in one blinding revelation, the reason why schools do not bestow wisdom, why governments cannot maintain order, why courts do not dispense justice, why prosperity fails to produce happiness, why utopian plans never generate utopias?

Do not decide lightly. The decision to read on is irrevocable. If you read, you can never regain your present state of blissful ignorance; you will never again unthinkingly venerate your superiors or dominate your subordinates. Never! The Peter Principle, once heard, cannot be forgotten.

What have you to gain by reading on? By conquering incompetence in yourself, and by understanding incompetence in others, you can do your own work more easily, gain promotion and make more money. You can avoid painful illnesses. You can become a leader of men. You can enjoy your leisure. You can gratify your friends, confound your enemies, impress your children and enrich and revitalize your marriage.

This knowledge, in short, will revolutionize your life—perhaps save it.

So, if you have courage, read on, mark, memorize and apply the Peter Principle.

CHAPTER I

The Peter Principle

"I begin to smell a rat."

M. DE CERVANTES

WHEN I was a boy I was taught that the men upstairs knew what they were doing. I was told, "Peter, the more you know, the further you go." So I stayed in school until I graduated from college and then went forth into the world clutching firmly these ideas and my new teaching certificate. During the first year of teaching I was upset to find that a number of teachers, school principals, supervisors and superintendents appeared to be unaware of their professional responsibilities and incompetent in executing their duties. For example my principal's main concerns were that all window shades be at the same level, that classrooms should be quiet and that no one step on or near the rose beds. The superintendent's main concerns were that no minority group, no matter how fanatical, should ever be offended and that all official forms be submitted on time. The children's education appeared farthest from the administrator mind.

At first I thought this was a special weakness of the school system in which I taught so I applied for certification

in another province. I filled out the special forms, enclosed the required documents and complied willingly with all the red tape. Several weeks later, back came my application and all the documents!

No, there was nothing wrong with my credentials; the forms were correctly filled out; an official departmental stamp showed that they had been received in good order. But an accompanying letter said, "The new regulations require that such forms cannot be accepted by the Department of Education unless they have been registered at the Post Office to ensure safe delivery. Will you please remail the forms to the Department, making sure to register them this time?"

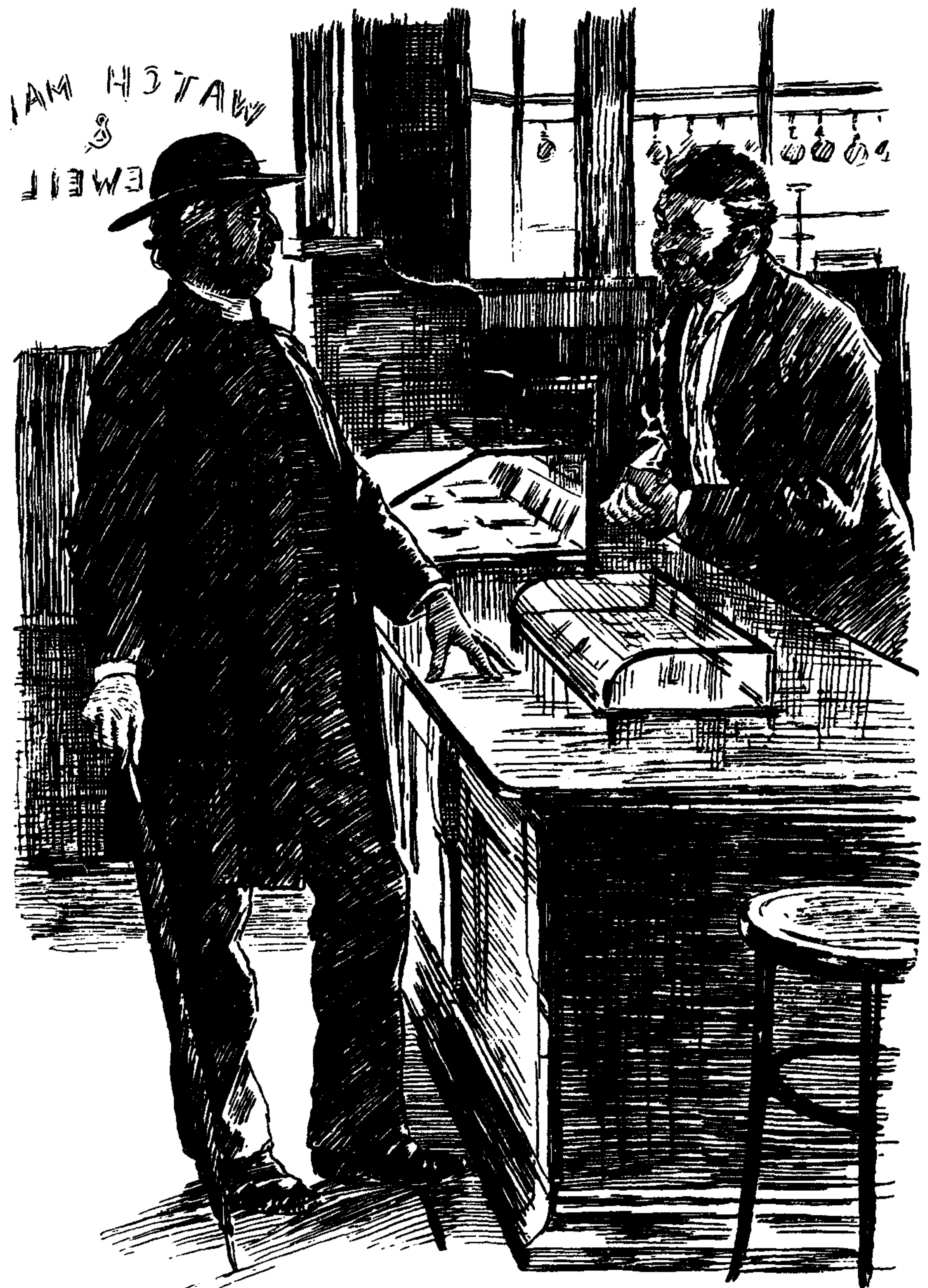
I began to suspect that the local school system did not have a monopoly on incompetence.

As I looked further afield, I saw that every organization contained a number of persons who could not do their jobs.

A Universal Phenomenon

Occupational incompetence is everywhere. Have you noticed it? Probably we all have noticed it.

We see indecisive politicians posing as resolute statesmen and the "authoritative source" who blames his misinformation on "situational imponderables." Limitless are the public servants who are indolent and insolent; military commanders whose behavioral timidity belies their dreadnaught rhetoric, and governors whose innate servility prevents their actually governing. In our sophistication, we virtually shrug aside the immoral cleric, corrupt judge, incoherent attorney, author who cannot write and English teacher who cannot spell. At universities we see proclamations authored by administrators whose own office communications are



In our sophistication, we virtually shrug aside the immoral cleric.

hopelessly muddled; and droning lectures from inaudible or incomprehensible instructors.

Seeing incompetence at all levels of every hierarchy—political, legal, educational and industrial—I hypothesized that the cause was some inherent feature of the rules governing the placement of employees. Thus began my serious study of the ways in which employees move upward through a hierarchy, and of what happens to them after promotion.

For my scientific data hundreds of case histories were collected. Here are three typical examples.

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT FILE, CASE No. 17 J. S. Minion * was a maintenance foreman in the public works department of Excelsior City. He was a favorite of the senior officials at City Hall. They all praised his unfailing affability.

“I like Minion,” said the superintendent of works. “He has good judgment and is always pleasant and agreeable.”

This behavior was appropriate for Minion’s position: he was not supposed to make policy, so he had no need to disagree with his superiors.

The superintendent of works retired and Minion succeeded him. Minion continued to agree with everyone. He passed to his foreman every suggestion that came from above. The resulting conflicts in policy, and the continual changing of plans, soon demoralized the department. Complaints poured in from the Mayor and other officials, from taxpayers and from the maintenance-workers’ union.

Minion still says “Yes” to everyone, and carries messages briskly back and forth between his superiors and his subordinates. Nominally a superintendent, he actually does the

* Some names have been changed, in order to protect the guilty.

work of a messenger. The maintenance department regularly exceeds its budget, yet fails to fulfill its program of work. In short, Minion, a competent foreman, became an incompetent superintendent.

SERVICE INDUSTRIES FILE, CASE No. 3 E. Tinker was exceptionally zealous and intelligent as an apprentice at G. Reece Auto Repair Inc., and soon rose to journeyman mechanic. In this job he showed outstanding ability in diagnosing obscure faults, and endless patience in correcting them. He was promoted to foreman of the repair shop.

But here his love of things mechanical and his perfectionism become liabilities. He will undertake any job that he thinks looks interesting, no matter how busy the shop may be. “We’ll work it in somehow,” he says.

He will not let a job go until he is fully satisfied with it.

He meddles constantly. He is seldom to be found at his desk. He is usually up to his elbows in a dismantled motor and while the man who should be doing the work stands watching, other workmen sit around waiting to be assigned new tasks. As a result the shop is always overcrowded with work, always in a muddle, and delivery times are often missed.

Tinker cannot understand that the average customer cares little about perfection—he wants his car back on time! He cannot understand that most of his men are less interested in motors than in their pay checks. So Tinker cannot get on with his customers or with his subordinates. He was a competent mechanic, but is now an incompetent foreman.

MILITARY FILE, CASE No. 8 Consider the case of the late renowned General A. Goodwin. His hearty, informal man-

ner, his racy style of speech, his scorn for petty regulations and his undoubted personal bravery made him the idol of his men. He led them to many well-deserved victories.

When Goodwin was promoted to field marshal he had to deal, not with ordinary soldiers, but with politicians and allied generalissimos.

He would not conform to the necessary protocol. He could not turn his tongue to the conventional courtesies and flatteries. He quarreled with all the dignitaries and took to lying for days at a time, drunk and sulking, in his trailer. The conduct of the war slipped out of his hands into those of his subordinates. He had been promoted to a position that he was incompetent to fill.

An Important Clue!

In time I saw that all such cases had a common feature. The employee had been promoted from a position of competence to a position of incompetence. I saw that, sooner or later, this could happen to every employee in every hierarchy.

HYPOTHETICAL CASE FILE, CASE NO. 1 Suppose you own a pill-rolling factory, Perfect Pill Incorporated. Your foreman-pill roller dies of a perforated ulcer. You need a replacement. You naturally look among your rank-and-file pill rollers.

Miss Oval, Mrs. Cylinder, Mr. Ellipse and Mr. Cube all show various degrees of incompetence. They will naturally be ineligible for promotion. You will choose—other things being equal—your most competent pill roller, Mr. Sphere, and promote him to foreman.

Now suppose Mr. Sphere proves competent as foreman.

Later, when your general foreman, Legree, moves up to Works Manager, Sphere will be eligible to take his place.

If, on the other hand, Sphere is an incompetent foreman, he will get no more promotion. He has reached what I call his "level of incompetence." He will stay there till the end of his career.

Some employees, like Ellipse and Cube, reach a level of incompetence in the lowest grade and are never promoted. Some, like Sphere (assuming he is not a satisfactory foreman), reach it after one promotion.

E. Tinker, the automobile repair-shop foreman, reached his level of incompetence on the third stage of the hierarchy. General Goodwin reached his level of incompetence at the very top of the hierarchy.

So my analysis of hundreds of cases of occupational incompetence led me on to formulate *The Peter Principle*:

In a Hierarchy Every Employee Tends to Rise to His Level of Incompetence

A New Science!

Having formulated the Principle, I discovered that I had inadvertently founded a new science, hierarchiology, the study of hierarchies.

The term "hierarchy" was originally used to describe the system of church government by priests graded into ranks. The contemporary meaning includes any organization whose members or employees are arranged in order of rank, grade or class.

Hierarchiology, although a relatively recent discipline, appears to have great applicability to the fields of public and private administration.

This Means You!

My Principle is the key to an understanding of all hierarchical systems, and therefore to an understanding of the whole structure of civilization. A few eccentrics try to avoid getting involved with hierarchies, but everyone in business, industry, trade-unionism, politics, government, the armed forces, religion and education is so involved. All of them are controlled by the Peter Principle.

Many of them, to be sure, may win a promotion or two, moving from one level of competence to a higher level of competence. But competence in that new position qualifies them for still another promotion. For each individual, for



A few eccentrics try to avoid getting involved with hierarchies.

*you, for me, the final promotion is from a level of competence to a level of incompetence.**

So, given enough time—and assuming the existence of enough ranks in the hierarchy—each employee rises to, and remains at, his level of incompetence. Peter's Corollary states:

In time, every post tends to be occupied by an employee who is incompetent to carry out its duties.

Who Turns the Wheels?

You will rarely find, of course, a system in which *every* employee has reached his level of incompetence. In most instances, something is being done to further the ostensible purposes for which the hierarchy exists.

Work is accomplished by those employees who have not yet reached their level of incompetence.

* The phenomena of "percussive sublimation" (commonly referred to as "being kicked upstairs") and of "the lateral arabesque" are not, as the casual observer might think, exceptions to the Principle. They are only pseudo-promotions, and will be dealt with in Chapter 3.

The Principle in Action

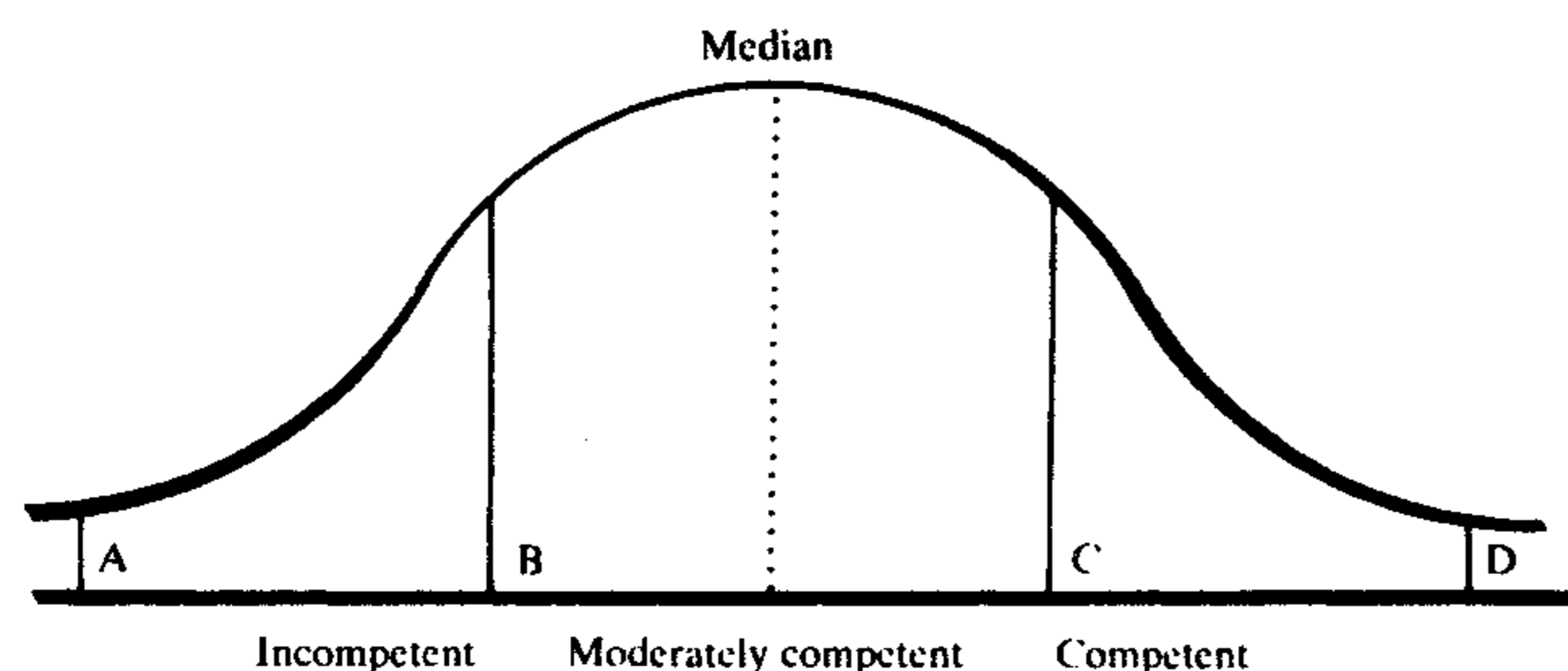
"To tell tales out of schoole"

J. HEYWOOD

A STUDY of a typical hierarchy, the Excelsior City school system, will show how the Peter Principle works within the teaching profession. Study this example and understand how hierarchiology operates within every establishment.

Let us begin with the rank-and-file classroom teachers. I group them, for this analysis, into three classes: competent, moderately competent and incompetent.

Distribution theory predicts, and experience confirms, that teachers will be distributed unevenly in these classes: the majority in the moderately competent class, minorities in the competent and incompetent classes. This graph illustrates the distribution:



The Case of the Conformist

An incompetent teacher is ineligible for promotion. Dorothea D. Ditto, for example, had been an extremely conforming student in college. Her assignments were either plagiarisms from textbooks and journals, or transcriptions of the professors' lectures. She always did exactly as she was told, no more, no less. *She was considered to be a competent student.* She graduated with honors from the Excelsior Teachers' College.

When she became a teacher, she taught exactly as she herself had been taught. She followed precisely the textbook, the curriculum guide and the bell schedule.

Her work goes fairly well, except when no rule or precedent is available. For example, when a water pipe burst and flooded the classroom floor, Miss Ditto kept on teaching until the principal rushed in and rescued the class.

"Miss Ditto!" he cried. "In the Name of the Superintendent! There are three inches of water on this floor. Why is your class still here?"

She replied, "I didn't hear the emergency bell signal. I pay attention to those things. You know I do. I'm certain you didn't sound the bell." Flummoxed before the power of her awesome *non sequitur*, the principal invoked a provision of the school code giving him emergency powers in an extraordinary circumstance and led her sopping class from the building.

So, although she never breaks a rule or disobeys an order, she is often in trouble, and will never gain promotion. Competent as a student, *she has reached her level of incompetence as a classroom teacher, and will therefore remain in that position throughout her teaching career.*

The Eligible Majority

Most beginning teachers are moderately competent or competent—see the area from B to D on the graph—and they will all be eligible for promotion. Here is one such case.

A Latent Weakness

Mr. N. Beeker had been a competent student, and became a popular science teacher. His lessons and lab periods were inspiring. His students were co-operative and kept the laboratory in order. Mr. Beeker was not good at paper work, but this weakness was offset, in the judgment of his superiors, by his success as a teacher.

Beeker was promoted to head of the science department where he now had to order all science supplies and keep extensive records. *His incompetence is evident!* For three years running he has ordered new Bunsen burners, but no tubing for connecting them. As the old tubing deteriorates, fewer and fewer burners are operable, although new ones accumulate on the shelves.

Beeker is not being considered for further promotion. *His ultimate position is one for which he is incompetent.*

Higher up the Hierarchy

B. Lunt had been a competent student, teacher and department head, and was promoted to assistant principal. In this post he got on well with teachers, students and parents, and was intellectually competent. He gained a further promotion to the rank of principal.

Till now, he had never dealt directly with school-board members, or with the district superintendent of education. It soon appeared that he lacked the required finesse to work



WR

He got on well with teachers, students and parents.

with these high officials. *He kept the superintendent waiting while he settled a dispute between two children. Taking a class for a teacher who was ill, he missed a curriculum revision committee meeting called by the assistant superintendent.*

He worked so hard at running his school that *he had no energy for running community organizations.* He declined offers to become program chairman of the Parent-Teacher Association, president of the Community Betterment League and consultant to the Committee for Decency in Literature.

His school lost community support and he fell out of favor with the superintendent. Lunt came to be regarded, by the public and by his superiors, as an incompetent principal. When the assistant superintendent's post became vacant, the school board declined to give it to Lunt. He remains, and will remain till he retires, unhappy and incompetent as a principal.

THE AUTOCRAT R. Driver, having proved his competence as student, teacher, department head, assistant principal and principal, was promoted to assistant superintendent. Previously he had only to interpret the school board's policy and have it efficiently carried out in his school. Now, as assistant superintendent, he must participate in the policy discussions of the board, using democratic procedures.

But Driver dislikes democratic procedures. He insists on his status as an expert. He lectures the board members much as he used to lecture his students when he was a classroom teacher. He tries to dominate the board as he dominated his staff when he was a principal.

The board now considers Driver an incompetent assistant superintendent. He will receive no further promotion.

SOON PARTED G. Spender was a competent student, English teacher, department head, assistant principal and principal. He then worked competently for six years as an assistant superintendent—patriotic, diplomatic, suave and well liked. He was promoted to superintendent. Here he was obliged to enter the field of school finance, in which he soon found himself at a loss.

From the start of his teaching career, Spender had never bothered his head about money. His wife handled his pay check, paid all household accounts and gave him pocket money each week.

Now Spender's incompetence in the area of finance is revealed. He purchased a large number of teaching machines from a fly-by-night company which went bankrupt without producing any programs to fit the machines. He had every classroom in the city equipped with television, although the only programs available in the area were for secondary schools. Spender has found his level of incompetence.

Another Promotion Mechanism

The foregoing examples are typical of what are called "line promotions." There is another mode of upward movement: the "staff promotion." The case of Miss T. Totland is typical.

Miss Totland, who had been a competent student and an outstanding primary teacher, was promoted to primary supervisor. She now has to teach, not children, but teachers. Yet *she still uses the techniques which worked so well with small children.*

in every hierarchy *the cream rises until it sours*. Look in the mirror and ask whether . . .

No! You would prefer to ask, "Are there no exceptions to the Principle? Is there no escape from its operation?"

I shall discuss these questions in subsequent chapters.



Miss Totland had been an outstanding primary teacher.

Addressing teachers, singly or in groups, she speaks slowly and distinctly. She uses mostly words of one or two syllables. She explains each point several times in different ways, to be sure it is understood. She always wears a bright smile.

Teachers dislike what they call her false cheerfulness and her patronizing attitude. Their resentment is so sharp that, instead of trying to carry out her suggestions, they spend much time devising excuses for *not* doing what she recommends.

Miss Totland has proved herself incompetent in communicating with primary teachers. She is therefore ineligible for further promotion, *and will remain as primary supervisor, at her level of incompetence.*

You Be the Judge

You can find similar examples in any hierarchy. Look around you where you work, and pick out the people who have reached their level of incompetence. You will see that

Apparent Exceptions

*"When the case goes bad, the guilty man
Excepts, and thins his jury all he can."*

J. DRYDEN

MANY people to whom I mention the Peter Principle do not want to accept it. They anxiously search for—and sometimes think they have found—flaws in my hierarchiological structure. So at this point I want to issue a warning: *do not be fooled by apparent exceptions.*

Apparent Exception No. 1: The Percussive Sublimation

"What about Walt Blockett's promotion? He was hopelessly incompetent, a bottleneck, so management *kicked him upstairs* to get him out of the road."

I often hear such questions. Let us examine this phenomenon, which I have named the *Percussive Sublimation*. Did Blockett move from a position of incompetence to a position of competence? No. He has simply been moved from

one unproductive position to another. Does he now undertake any greater responsibility than before? No. Does he accomplish any more work in the new position than he did in the old? No.

The percussive sublimation is a pseudo-promotion. Some Blockett-type employees actually believe that they have received a genuine promotion; others recognize the truth. But the main function of a pseudo-promotion is *to deceive people outside the hierarchy*. When this is achieved, the maneuver is counted a success.

But the experienced hierarchiologist will never be deceived. Hierarchiologically, the only move that we can accept as a genuine promotion is a move *from a level of competence*.

What is the effect of a successful percussive sublimation? Assume that Blockett's employer, Kickly, is still competent. Then by moving Blockett he achieves three goals:

1) He camouflages the ill-success of his promotion policy. To admit that Blockett was incompetent would lead observers to think, "Kickly should have realized, before giving Blockett that last promotion, that Blockett wasn't the man for the job." But a percussive sublimation *justifies the previous promotion* (in the eyes of employees and on-lookers, not to a hierarchiologist).

2) He supports staff morale. Some employees at least will think, "If *Blockett* can get a promotion, *I* can get a promotion." *One percussive sublimation serves as carrot-on-a-stick to many other employees.*

3) He maintains the hierarchy. Even though Blockett is incompetent, *he must not be fired*: he probably knows enough of Kickly's business to be dangerous in a competitive hierarchy.