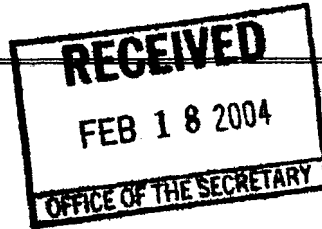


**Michael S. Asato**  
400 West 25<sup>th</sup> Street #2A  
New York, NY 10001

759  
(917) 687-8413  
m\_asato@ix.netcom.com



February 10, 2004

Jonathan G. Katz, Secretary  
Securities and Exchange Commission  
450 Fifth Street N.W.  
Washington, DC 20549-0609

Re: File No. No. S7-19-03

Dear Mr. Katz:

I am writing in regard to the agenda of the roundtable on March 10, 2004 that will discuss the rules proposed by the Commission on Oct. 14, 2003, relating to security holder director nominations.

In its solicitation for comments on its proposed rule on security holder director nominations, it has received over 12,000 comments. From my perspective, the two key decisions to be made by the Commission are:

1. whether shareholder "democracy" should be based on the *positive majority power of appointment* (e.g., open shareholder access to the proxy machinery), or the *negative majority power of dismissal* (e.g., triggering event via "just vote no" that signifies a breakdown of the proxy process);
2. whether outside directors should be regarded as *delegates* for the sponsoring shareholders, or *trustees* for the shareholders-at-large. Note that under Madisonian democracy, the Founding Fathers saw elected officials as Burkean representatives or trustees for the public-at-large.

If I understand Delaware Supreme Court Chief Justice E. Norman Veasey's notion of an evolving expectation correctly, a breakdown of the proxy process as defined by the SEC would signify a breach of the fiduciary duty of good faith, which shareholders could then *immediately* remedy through judicial review. I have expressed my other views on this matter in my comment letter dated June 12, 2003 (Re: File No. S7-10-03) and I will spare you a regurgitation here.

For the Commission's rule making process to be perceived as responsive, fair and thoughtful, I would suggest the **problem solving approach** of the U.S. Army staff study (see attached 1). Instead of problem solving, what we typically see is "solutioneering," which is the championing of a proposed solution. The key point here is that in problem solving, one should always **start with the problem** (from attachment 2):

In politics solutions, real or attempted, are normally called policies. Every reputable political or social policy is a proposed solution to a problem; and we always need to be clear about the problem before we can propose the solution. We must be able to ask of a policy: **'To what problem is this the solution?'** If there is no problem to which a given policy is a solution then the policy is superfluous.... It is essential to start from *problems*, and to arrive at the formulation of each policy only as a solution to a problem.

The roundtable could help to clearly formulate the problem(s) to be solved, and flesh out the unintended consequences of the different policy proposals. As the LMDC's design competition for the WTC site plan showed, the openness, transparency and inclusiveness of the problem solving approach should enable the Commission to sidestep any firestorm that might result from its final rule making.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Asato".

Michael Asato

Enclosures

## Appendix D

# STAFF STUDIES AND DECISION PAPERS

This appendix gives steps and information on preparing staff studies and decision papers. Formats for both are also provided.

## STAFF STUDIES

To solve a problem, a staff officer must research the problem to identify issues, develop and evaluate alternatives, and recommend effective action based on relevant facts. The staff study is one means to present his findings. Because a staff study generally conforms to the problem-solving model, it is both a formal military problem-solving process and a format. The staff study is the written form of a decision briefing.

### Preparing the Staff Study

Procedures for preparing a staff study include the following seven steps:

- 1. Identify and state the problem.** This step is crucial as the actual problem may not at first be obvious. Therefore, before undertaking the study, the staff officer must determine exactly what the problem is and precisely and clearly define the problem's scope and limitations. He then writes the problem statement as an infinitive phrase and submits it for approval to the authority directing the study. The directing authority also approves any later changes in the staff study's scope or direction.
- 2. List facts and assumptions.** After completing the problem statement, the staff officer lists all facts bearing on the problem. If crucial facts are not available, the staff officer uses valid assumptions to replace facts and describe conditions he must fulfill before accepting the conclusions without reservation. The staff officer states the assumption in the future or conditional tense (for example, will or might be this or that). Assumptions are grounded in factual information. They are statements that may or may not be true; however, available data indicate that they are true or will be true at some time in the future. A valid assumption would be a fact if current data could prove it.
- 3. Develop possible solutions.** After listing all known facts and valid assumptions, the staff officer poses possible solutions. He may want to brainstorm possible solutions before doing intensive research. An "obviously best" solution is rare. After extensive evaluation, the staff officer selects the best available solution, screening out infeasible or unacceptable alternatives. He analyzes the remaining alternatives against previously determined evaluation criteria using an "advantages and disadvantages" format.
- 4. Research and collect data.** After developing possible solutions, he begins to collect additional corroborating facts. Primary sources of information are official documents, technical reports, manuals, previous staff studies, and resources available from libraries. The staff officer may also find information in sources such as technical libraries, bibliographies and abstracts, and the Defense Document Center. If time permits, and if it seems appropriate, the staff officer can supplement official data with original data from persons intimately connected with the problem, including experienced local colleagues, subject-matter experts, and operational personnel who have first-hand knowledge of the problem. Methods to consider for collecting original data might include interviews (either by telephone or personal visits), letter requests for specific information, or questionnaires administered to operational personnel.
- 5. Interpret data.** As data collection progresses, the staff officer begins to pare his list of possible solutions. He should reject all unsuitable alternatives. He may also identify areas of potential disagreement. Dealing with this now helps eliminate or reduce possible nonconcurrences. During the research, the staff officer should ask, "Is this solution feasible? acceptable? suitable?" Feasible solutions are those that can be implemented with available resources. Acceptable solutions are those worth the cost or risk involved in their implementation. Suitable solutions are those that actually solve the problem. Looking at feasibility, acceptability, and suitability will help direct further research by eliminating unsatisfactory solutions, identifying solutions, and checking them for nonconcurrences. It will also call attention to the facts and evaluation criteria needed for evaluating alternative solutions.
- 6. Evaluate alternative solutions.** To do the staff study properly, the staff officer must consider all reasonable alternatives (courses of action) as possible solutions. The staff officer relates the evaluation criteria

to the known facts and valid assumptions. These criteria serve as the yardstick against which he measures all alternatives. Next, the staff officer compares and contrasts the alternatives. If he uses quantitative techniques, such as a decision matrix, he should use them as back-up data, place them in an annex, and refer to them in paragraph 5 of the staff study. The best solution will be the most feasible, suitable, and acceptable solution fulfilling evaluation criteria.

7. **Prepare the staff study.** The staff study consists of a summary sheet (body) and annexes. Along with the 10 basic paragraphs, the summary sheet may include—

- A list of annexes.
- Concurrences.
- Nonconcurrences.
- Considerations of nonconcurrences.
- A list of annexes added to summarize lengthy nonconcurrences and their considerations.
- Action by the approving authority.
- An implementing document.

Annexes contain details and supporting information. The staff officer uses them to keep the summary sheet concise so that readers can use it as a ready reference. Annex A contains implementing memorandums, directives, or letters submitted for signature or approval. Other annexes contain detailed data, lengthy discussions, execution documents, and bibliographies. The staff officer uses appendixes and tabs with capital letters. For example, page A-III-C-5 represents Annex A, Appendix III, Tab C, Page 5.

NOTE: See also Appendix H.

### Coordinating the Staff Study

Conducting staff studies normally involves coordination with other staff officers to obtain concurrences or nonconcurrences on desired recommendations and other aspects of the study. The staff officer should anticipate

nonconcurrences. He should write considerations of nonconcurrence, assess them objectively and accurately, and make them into enclosures (annexes) to the staff study.

NOTE: See Figure D-1 for an example of an annotated format for a staff study. Use memorandum format in accordance with AR 25-50.

### Common Problems of Staff Studies

The following is a list of the most common problems found in staff studies. Staff officers should review this list before beginning a staff study. While completing the staff study, the officer evaluates it using these questions:

- Is the topic too broad?
- Is the problem properly defined?
- Are facts or assumptions clear and valid?
- Are there any unnecessary facts or assumptions?
- Are there any facts that appear for the first time in the discussion?
- Are there a limited number of options or courses of action?
- Are evaluation criteria invalid or too limited?
- Is the discussion too long?
- Is the discussion incomplete: must the reader look at annexes?
- Does the conclusion include a discussion?
- Is the logic incorrect or incomplete; does the conclusion follow from analysis?
- Can the solution be implemented within resource or time constraints?
- Do the conclusions and recommendations answer the problem?
- Is there an "implementing" directive?
- Have new criteria been introduced?

Office Symbol (Marks Number)

Date

**MEMORANDUM FOR**

**SUBJECT:** Briefly describe the study's contents. Be specific. Do not just say Staff Study.

**1. Problem.** Write a concise statement of the problem, stated as a task, in the infinitive or question form; for example, *To determine.... or How to....* Normally include the *who, what, when, and where* if pertinent.

**2. Recommendation.** Recommend a specific course of action (who, what, when, and where). *The recommendation must solve the problem.* If necessary or directed, place an implementing document at Annex A.

**3. Background.** Provide a lead-in to the study, briefly *stating why the problem exists.*

**4. Facts.** State facts *that influence the problem or its solution.* Make sure the facts are stated and attributed correctly. The data must stand alone; either it is a clear fact or is attributed to a source that asserts it true. There is no limit to the number of facts. Provide all the facts relevant to the problem (not just the facts used to support the study). State any guidance given by the authority directing the study. Refer to annexes as necessary for amplification, references, mathematical formulas, or tabular data.

**5. Assumptions.** Identify any assumptions necessary for a logical discussion of the problem. If deleting the assumption has no effect on the problem, you do not need the assumption.

**6. Courses of Action.** List *all* possible suitable, feasible, acceptable, distinguishable, and complete courses of actions. If a course of action (COA) is not self-explanatory, include a brief explanation of what the COA consists of to ensure the reader understands. If the COA is complex, refer to an annex for a complete description (including pertinent COA facts).

a. **COA 1.** *List specifically by name, for example, Route A.*

b. **COA 2.** *Same as above.*

c. **COA 3.** *Same as above.*

**7. Criteria.** List the criteria used to judge COAs. Criteria serve as yardsticks or benchmarks against which to measure each COA. Define criteria to ensure the reader understands them. Be specific. For example, if using cost as a criterion, talk about that measurement in dollars. *Use criteria that relate to the facts and assumptions:* There should be a fact or an assumption listed in paragraph 4 or 5, respectively, that supports each of the criteria. The sum of the facts and assumptions should at a minimum be greater than the number of criteria. Consider criteria in three related but distinct areas, as indicated below.

a. **Screening Criteria.** Define screening criteria that a COA must meet to be suitable, feasible, acceptable, distinguishable, and complete. *Accept or reject a COA based solely on these criteria.* Define each criterion and state the required standard in absolute terms. For example, using cost as a screening criterion, define cost as "dollars" and specify the maximum (or minimum) cost you can pay. In subsequent subparagraphs, describe failed COAs and state why they failed.

b. **Evaluation Criteria.** This is criteria used to measure, evaluate, and rank-order each COA during analysis and comparison paragraphs. Use issues that will determine the quality of each COA and *define how to measure each COA against each criterion and specify the preferred state for each.* For example, define cost as total cost including research, development, production, and distribution in dollars—less is better; or cost is manufacturer's suggested retail price—less is better. *Establish a dividing line that separates advantages and disadvantages for a criterion.* An evaluation criterion must rank-order COAs to be valid.

Some criteria may be both screening and evaluation criteria, such as, cost. You may use one definition of cost; however, the required or benchmark value cannot be the same for both screening and

**Figure D-1. Format for a staff study**

evaluation criteria. If the value is the same, the criteria will not distinguish between advantages and disadvantages for remaining COAs.

(1) **Define Evaluation Criteria.** Each evaluation criterion is defined by five elements written in paragraph or narrative form.

- A short title. ("Cost," for example.)
- Definition. (The amount of money to buy . . .)
- Unit of measure. (For example, US dollars, miles, acres.)
- Dividing line or benchmark. (The point at which a criterion becomes an advantage. Ideally the benchmark should result in gaining a tangible benefit. Be able to justify how you came up with the value—through reasoning, historical data, current allocation, averaging.)
- Formula. (Stated in two difference ways. That "more or less is better" {\$400 is an advantage, >\$400 is a disadvantage, less is better} or subjectively in terms such as "a night movement is better than a daylight movement.")

(2) **Evaluation Criterion #2.** Again define and write the criterion in one coherent paragraph. To curtail length, do not use multiple subparagraphs.

(3) **Evaluation Criterion #3,** and so on.

**c. Weighting of Criteria.** Establish the relative importance of one criterion over the others. Explain how each criterion compares to each of the other criteria (equal, favored, slightly favored), or provide the values from the decision matrix and explain why you measured the criterion as such.

**NOTE:** Screening criteria are not weighted. They are required, absolute standards that each COA must meet or the COA is rejected.

**8. Analysis.** For each COA, list the advantages and disadvantages that result from testing the COAs against the stated evaluation criteria. Include the payoff value for each COA as tested. *Do not compare one COA with the others* (that is the next step). *Do not introduce new criterion.* If there are six criteria, there must be six advantages or disadvantages (as appropriate) for each COA. If there are many "neutral" payoffs, examine the criteria to ensure they are specific and examine the application of the criteria to ensure it is logical and objective. Neutral should rarely be used.

**a.** The first subparagraph of the analysis should state the results of applying the screening criterion if not already listed in paragraph 7a(2). List screened COAs as part of paragraph 7a for clarity and unity.

**b. COA 1.** (List the COA by name.)

(1) **Advantage(s).** List the advantages in narrative form in a single clear, concise paragraph. Explain why it is an advantage and provide the payoff value for the COA measured against the criteria. Do not use bullets; remember, the paper must stand alone.

(2) **Disadvantage(s).** List the disadvantages for each COA and explain why they are disadvantages. Include the payoff values or how the COA measured out.

**c. COA 2.**

(1) **Advantage.** If there is only one advantage or disadvantage, list it as shown here.

(2) **Disadvantage.** If there is no advantage or disadvantage, state "none."

**Figure D-1. Format for a staff study (continued)**

**9. Comparison of the COAs.**

a. After testing each COA against the stated criteria, compare the COAs to each other. Determine which COA best satisfies the criteria. Develop for the reader, in a logical, orderly manner, the rationale you use to reach the conclusion in paragraph 10 below. For example, *Cost: COA 1 cost less than COA 2, which is equal to the cost of COA 4. COA 3 has the greatest cost.*

b. You can use quantitative techniques (such as decision matrixes, select weights, and sensitivity analyses) to support your comparisons. Summarize the results of these quantitative techniques clearly so that the reader does not have to refer to an annex. *Do not explain the quantitative technique, simply state what the results are.* Remember, quantitative techniques are only tools to support the analysis and comparison. They are *not* the analysis and comparison.

**10. Conclusion.** Address the conclusion drawn from analyzing and comparing all the relevant factors (for example, *COA 2 is the best COA because . . .*). The conclusion must answer the problem statement. If it does not, then either the conclusion or the problem statement is incorrect.

Encl

1. Implementing document (TAB A)

\_\_\_\_\_

2.

\_\_\_\_\_

3.

(Signature Block)

4.

\_\_\_\_\_

**NOTE:** Address supporting enclosures in the body of the study. The enclosures you produce (implementing document, decision matrixes, and so on) must comply with common format requirements (AR 25-50).

**Concurrences/Nonconcurrences:** (List directorates/agencies/persons with whom you must coordinate.)

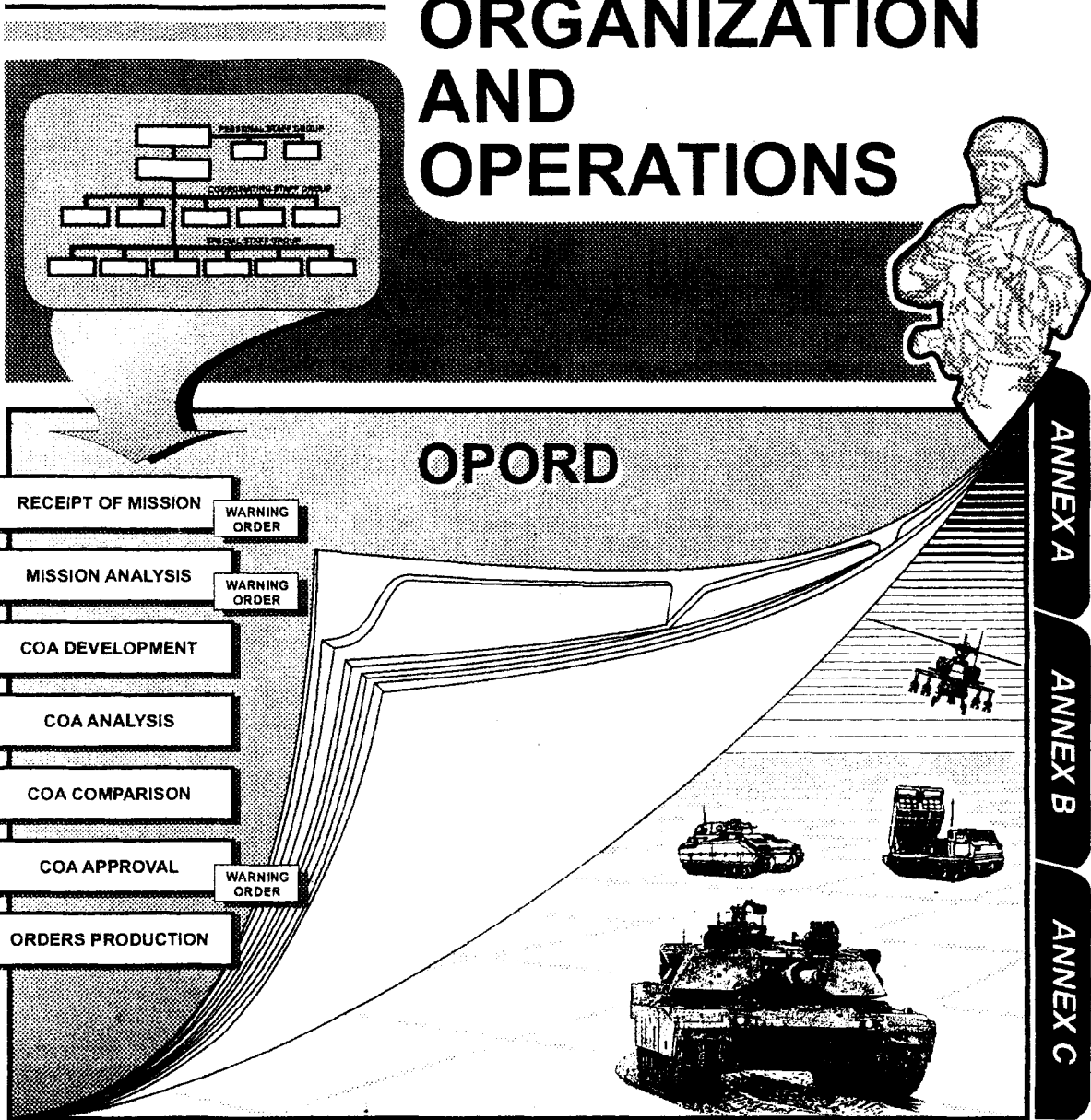
<b>Section/Agency</b>	<b>Concur/Nonconcur</b> _____	<b>Date</b> _____
-----------------------	-------------------------------	-------------------

**NOTE:** Each officer must initial his/her concurrence or nonconcurrence, followed by his rank, name, position and/or title, telephone number, and E-mail address, and briefly state the reason for his nonconcurrence. This statement normally is on a separate page that will become an annex to the study.

**Consideration of Nonconcurrence:** The author of the study states the results of the consideration of any nonconcurrences. He either briefly states the results or attaches them as another annex. If consideration shows he cannot support the concurrence he must state the reasons. The author signs or initials the consideration of nonconcurrence(s).

**Figure D-1. Format for a staff study (continued)**

# STAFF ORGANIZATION AND OPERATIONS



Headquarters, Department of the Army

DISTRIBUTION RESTRICTION: Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited

FEB 14 1

# KARL POPPER: PHILOSOPHY AND PROBLEMS

ROYAL INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY SUPPLEMENT: 39

EDITED BY

Anthony O'Hear

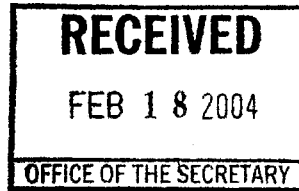
 **CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

1995



## What Use is Popper to a Politician?

BRYAN MAGEE



Some years acquire symbolic status, and one such year is 1968. All over Europe and the United States university students exploded into violent rebellion. Insofar as this would-be revolution had an ideology it was unquestionably Marx-inspired, even if the Marxism was not always orthodox. It so happens that in the years 1970–1971 I was teaching philosophy at Balliol College, Oxford. And because of Oxford University's system, almost unique, of individual tuition for undergraduates, this meant I found myself in a continuing one-to-one relationship with bright students who were in the throes of revolutionary fervour.

Arguing with them was enormously illuminating for me. It seemed as if the more intelligent they were the more passionately Marxist they were—but also the more affected they were by intellectually serious criticisms of Marxism, which usually they were hearing for the first time. It was when they found themselves unable to meet these that they revealed where their fundamental motivation lay. This was not usually a positive one of belief in Marxist ideas. Still less was it commitment to communist forms of society, which usually they had been defending without knowing anything about the reality of them. The motivation was usually negative: it was inability or refusal to come to terms with their own society as they saw it. Psychologically, this was nearly always at the root of their attitude.

Basically the chain of cause and effect between their ideas seemed to go something like this. They longed to live in a perfect society. But only too obviously the society in which they found themselves contained serious evils. So this form of society had to be rejected. A particularly interesting point here is the fact that, because what they demanded was perfection, they thought that if anything was seriously wrong then the whole must be rejected. If, say, newspapers reported cases of old and poor people dying of hypothermia in winter because they had no heating in their homes the students would say savagely 'There's something sick about a society that lets old people freeze to death in the winter'. If there were reports of students unable to take up university places because of an inability to get grants they would say 'There's something fundamentally rotten about a society that refuses to educate people unless they've got money.' It was virtually a formulaic

response, of the fixed form: 'There's something fundamentally rotten about any society in which *x* happens', with *x* standing for any serious social evil. If anything *at all* was seriously wrong, the whole of society was sick: unless everything's perfect everything's rotten.<sup>1</sup> Such an attitude could rest only on Utopian assumptions. And it quite naturally made those who held it receptive to a holistic as well as systematic social critique of the only society they knew. It also led most of them to suppose, erroneously, that there must be something somewhere that was infinitely better: since, plainly, things were not perfect here, they must be perfect somewhere else—or, at least, people somewhere else must be trying. Criticisms of communist reality were nearly always met by the counter-accusation that things were just as bad here, if not worse, and at least the Communists were striving to realize a moral ideal, which our cynical and self-interested politicians were not.

These attitudes display several errors of a fundamental character to which intelligent people in general are prone when they think about politics. Instead of starting from what actually exists, and trying to think how to improve it, they start from an ideal of the perfect society, a sort of blueprint in the mind, and then start thinking of how to change society to fit the blueprint. If they cannot see any practicable way of getting from reality to the blueprint they may be tempted then to think in terms of sweeping reality away, in order to start from scratch, in order to realize the blueprint.

Karl Popper's ideas are a marvellous antidote to such illusions. First of all he is insistent on its being an inescapable fact that wherever you want to go you have to start from where you are. Even the most cataclysmic revolution is an attempt to achieve certain ends, a way of trying to change society as it actually is into a different form of society that is preferred. And as the history of revolutions illustrates, existing society never is swept completely away: huge and important features of it always persist into the successor society, usually to the bafflement and chagrin of the revolutionaries. As a way of achieving desired social change revolution is exceedingly cost-ineffective as well as ineffectual. First and foremost, large numbers of people get killed, or are made to suffer appallingly in other ways. Second, desirable as well as undesirable social fabric is destroyed. Third, unrestrained violence on a large scale is uncontrollable when accompanied by a breakdown in the social order. Fourth, because it is uncontrollable the kind of society that emerges from it is nearly always one which the revolutionaries themselves say is quite different from what they wanted.

All forms of political thinking that start from blueprints of what

is desired are anathema to Popper, and rightly so. All modern forms of society are in a state of perpetual change, and as time goes by the pace of this change gets faster, not slower. If we were to set ourselves the task of actualizing the most ideal blueprint, and then succeeded in actualizing it, even then change would not just suddenly stop. Marx and Engels thought it would—thought that with the realization of their perfect society history would come to an end. But nobody now believes this. Change will go on. So from the very moment we actualize our blueprint reality will start moving away from it and turning into something else. So the real political task is not to actualize an ideal state of affairs that can then be preserved for ever. This is the task to which the greatest political thinkers of the past, such as Plato and Marx, addressed themselves, but in reality it is not even an option. The real political task is to manage change.

As part of the process of perpetual change, peoples' aspirations and priorities perpetually change. So again, there too, even if we were able to start out with an ideal blueprint, and to succeed in our approach to it, as we worked towards it peoples' wishes would start moving away from it, so that even before we achieved it scarcely anybody would wholeheartedly want it. Something close to this has only too obviously happened in the late twentieth century with the ideal of socialism under its classic definition of public ownership and centralized planning of the means of production, distribution and exchange—an ideal which earlier in the century powerfully motivated millions of intelligent and well-meaning people, yet to which now scarcely anyone subscribes.

There is a need for perpetual revision of aspirations and goals, and this is inimical to the whole idea of a blueprint. Blueprints are fixed, static: if they changed unceasingly they would not be blueprints. They are therefore at best a source of never-ending problems, given the reality of permanent social change, and only too often they are a source of tragedy. Because they are fixed, peoples' attitudes towards them become fixed: they become objects of quasi-religious commitment and belief. And because they are seen as ideally desirable, political opponents who actively try to prevent them from being realized come to be looked on as wicked people who must be stopped, perhaps even removed from the scene altogether; and their elimination is seen as fully justified, indeed demanded, morally. Blueprints thus lead to rigidity, fanaticism, and through them to anti-rationality in many forms. The man with a blueprint usually knows he is right; and because of his utter certitude he feels justified in eliminating opposition by whatever means may be found necessary.

Popper's recommendation is that what we should eliminate are blueprints—eliminate them from our thinking entirely. Instead of basing our approach on an imaginary state of affairs that does not actually exist and is never going to exist, he recommends that we start from the social reality in which we find ourselves, and that we examine it critically to discover what is wrong with it, and to see how it may be improved. From that starting point he proposes what might be called a methodology for the management of change. I would like to go through this proposed method step by step.

First of all we are required to formulate our problems with care. That means, among other things, not taking for granted what they are. We have to ask ourselves what precisely are, say, the main problems that face us in the field of primary education? What, precisely, are the main problems that face us with the treatment of teen-age offenders against the law? What, precisely, are the main problems that face us in our relations with the United States? And so on and so forth.

There will, legitimately, be differences of opinion about what the problems are, before one has even begun to think in terms of solutions, and these differences should be thoroughly debated. It is of the utmost importance to get diagnosis right before one proceeds to cure, otherwise the proposed cure will be the wrong one, not effective, quite possibly harmful. So a lot of time and trouble and thought and work needs to go into the identification and formulation of problems before one attempts to move forward from that position.

Once a problem has been identified and clearly formulated, the next step is to consider alternative possible solutions. At this stage especially there can be opportunity for great boldness, and also for imagination and ingenuity, for freshness of perception and vision, for unexpected initiative. Usually it is here, if anywhere, that creative politics comes in.

But of course many if not most of the proposed solutions would not actually, if tried, work out very well in practice. As soon as you start to do something, anything, unexpected snags arise. Even in the most apparently sensible undertakings measures take longer than expected, or cost more, or prove to be administratively cumbersome, or alienate some of the individuals involved, or have unfortunate side-effects.

It is a matter of great practical concern that these drawbacks should be minimized by being foreseen and avoided. So proposed solutions need to be critically examined and debated, with the explicit object of bringing their faults to light before they are

turned into reality. The more effective the criticism at this stage, the greater the saving in time, economic resources and human happiness, so a debate of this kind is not an abstract, airy-fairy matter, but a hard-headed practical one. The proposals whose effective criticism is more desirable, because most fruitful, are those of government, because these are the ones that are put into practice on the largest scale, and with the most powerful backing, and with the greatest effect on peoples' lives. Full and free critical public discussion of proposed government policies is therefore essential if avoidable large-scale error is indeed to be avoided: without such discussion there will inevitably be more, and more costly, public-policy disasters than there need to be.

And of course there will be mistakes anyway. Even after a great deal of misplaced expectation has been eliminated by critical discussion, and the proposals thus critically improved are put into practice, things will still go wrong. Our actions have unforeseen consequences. So there is a need for practical as well as theoretical vigilance. After a policy has survived critical discussion and been put into practice, a critical eye needs to be kept on how it is actually working out, with a view to catching the first sign that is not working as hoped. At this stage the most important thing is not to be seeking reassurance that all is well, but the opposite, to be on the alert for the possibility that things are not going as they should. This requires the practical monitoring of public policy in action, and for that to be effective people need to be free to criticize not only a government's proposals but also its deeds. Again, the sooner harmful practices are identified the greater the saving will be in time, resources and human happiness. Governments that forbid public debate and criticism of their activities are bound to persist in mistaken, costly and harmful practices for much longer than they otherwise would; and being government activities these mistakes will usually be on a large scale.

It should always be remembered that the debate surrounding policies and their implementation may bring to light errors not only in them but also in the process one stage further back, the formulation of problems: we may come belatedly to see that our initial formation of our problem was wrong. Indeed, Popper remarks that we seldom really understand a problem fully until we have tried to solve it and failed.

This, in its barest outline, is the methodology recommended by Popper to the practical politician. Some people may say it is embarrassingly obvious. I only wish it were. You do not need to be a very attentive reader of the serious press to realize that this is not how real-life politics is for the most part conducted. And as some-

one who was a professional politician for nearly 10 years I can assure you that the thought processes involved do not come easily to many politicians; indeed, some have serious difficulty in understanding them even when they are explained. If Popper's principles seem obvious to a philosophy-oriented audience it is because they are so rational, so congruent with situational logic. That is a powerful recommendation for them, but alas, it has not yet brought about their general acceptance or even comprehension. The task of actively promoting them still requires adherents.

Other critics may object that the whole approach is too cautious and therefore too slow. We haven't got time for all that talk, they may say: it's a luxury we can't afford. To this I believe the best reply is that of all possible political methods this is the one most likely to maximize the extent to which change remains under rational control. Attempts to short-circuit processes of criticism are almost bound to lead more error, and therefore more cost, and also more in the way of unintended consequences. There may indeed be more *change*, but disconcertingly much of it, too much, will not be in the required direction. This turned out to be one of the systematic shortcomings of centralized planning, and led in practice to its becoming almost invariably associated with systematized lying. Of course one cannot go on talking for ever. Decisions have to be made. But a debate that is genuine discussion and not just waffle or delaying tactics, although it may take time now, will save more than time later on.

The approach advocated by Popper is a broad recipe for effective and successful problem-solving. As such it has a general application to most practical affairs, not only to politics but to administration in any form, and also to business. People familiar with his philosophy of science and his more general theory of knowledge will have noted already that it instantiates his formula for problem-solving in those fields:

$$P_1 \rightarrow TS \rightarrow EE \rightarrow P_2$$

where  $P_1$  is the initial problem, TS the trial solution proposed to this problem, EE the process of error elimination applied to the trial solution, and  $P_2$  the new situation thus arrived at, with its new and sometimes unexpected problems. In fact the relationship between Popper's methodology of politics and his theory of knowledge is so close that it is worth our going on now to look at some specific features that they have in common.

First, Popper regards himself in both fields as addressing not a static or stable state of affairs but a process of change, and he sees the main challenge as being how to manage change, in one case the

growth of knowledge, in the other ongoing social development. In both cases he sees the demands this makes on us as consisting above all else of problem-solving. In both cases, therefore, he thinks we should start from the careful analysis and understanding of problems, and not leap straight away to what is in fact the second stage, the proposal of trial solutions.

In politics solutions, real or attempted, are normally called policies. Every reputable political or social policy is a proposed solution to a problem; and we always need to be clear about the problem before we can propose the solution. We must always be able to ask of a policy: 'To what problem is this the solution?' If there is no problem to which a given policy is a solution then the policy is superfluous, and therefore harmful, if only because it consumes resources to no purpose. Policies which are not solutions to any identifiable problem are part of the common currency of so-called 'practical affairs.' Committees are especially good at producing them. I have stopped many a committee meeting dead in its tracks by asking the question: 'To what problem is this the solution?' The whole notion that you can start with policies is deeply erroneous, and very damaging in practice. One of the forms it takes is starting from a blueprint, because of course a blueprint is a proposed solution; but it takes many other and more mundane forms. It is essential to start from *problems*, and to arrive at the formulation of each policy only as a solution to a problem.

According to Popper, in both politics and the growth of knowledge, criticism is the most effective agent of desirable change, and must therefore be not only free but welcomed, and acted upon. We can never be in a position to know that we have got things right; our formulations and policies are always open to improvement; therefore any notions of certainty or unquestionable authority are not only out of place but damaging. The best we can *do*, like the best of our knowledge, is the best only for the time being, and in the prevailing circumstances. It is always, in principle, improvable, and therefore should always be subject to critical discussion.

In practice this attitude ought to breed a respect for political opponents, and a willingness to learn from them. In all the democracies I know, politicians lag behind the public on this matter. They would be more, not less, popular with their electorates if they were more willing than they are to admit error, and they would also be more, not less, popular if they were more willing than they are to admit that their opponents are quite often right.

The Popper approach constitutes a programme for practical and rational improvement, and the usual word for that in politics is 'reform': so it is a methodology of reform. But it leaves open the

question of how quick or slow reform should be, the even more important question of how radical it should be, and the most important question of all, namely what it should consist of. This makes it an approach that can be adopted by anyone on the political spectrum between those who want no change at all and those who want revolution. What this means in practice is that it can be adopted by anyone committed to democratic politics: so it is also what you might call a methodology for democracy. It so happens that the youngish Karl Popper who wrote *The Open Society and Its Enemies* in the late 1930s and early 1940s had always been left of centre, and throughout the whole of his adult life up to that point a strongly, emotionally committed social democrat. But like so many people he moved to the right in middle age, and by the time of his death would have been accounted a conservative by most people—though to the end of his days he continued to regard himself as a liberal in the classic sense of the word, meaning someone who puts individual liberty first among the political values. My point is that his basic approach is one that can be adopted by anyone committed to democratic politics, from the extreme democratic left to the extreme democratic right, which indeed was the gamut that Popper himself passed through.

Having said that, though, the point has to be made that the Popperian approach sits most comfortably with a left-of-centre position, the sort of position Popper himself occupied when he produced it. This is because it gives rise naturally to a radical attitude towards institutions. It is not only policies that have to be seen as attempts to solve problems: institutions do too. A country's education system is its solution to the problem of how to educate its young; its armed forces are its solution to the problem of how to defend itself; its health services are its solution to the problem of what public provision to make for those of its citizens who need medical help; and so on and so forth. Just as in the case of policies, an institution that is not a solution to any problem is superfluous—indeed, it is that condition that renders institutions obsolete. And because an institution is a practical solution to a problem, so long as it has a real function it is capable of being more effective or less, more satisfactory or less, more comprehensive or less, more expensive or less, more popular or less, and so on. The Popperian approach involves subjecting institutions to a permanently critical evaluation in order to monitor how well they are solving the problems they exist to solve—and involves moreover a permanent willingness to change them in the light of changing requirements. I have always taken the famous dictum of Jesus of Nazareth 'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath' to mean

that we should bend institutions to fit human beings, not human beings to fit institutions; but this is at odds, I do believe, with some of the basic attitudes common to political conservatism, which include a reverence for institutions as such, a deep-seated unwillingness to change them, and a readiness rather to let their requirements override personal considerations. There is no logical incompatibility, but there is, I think, a certain psychological uncomfatableness in combining a Popperian approach to the requirements of institutional change with a typically conservative emotional attachment to existing institutions. The only kind of conservative with whom the two can sit comfortably together are those of the radical right, politicians like Margaret Thatcher, whose approach to traditional institutions was in fact highly disruptive.

The permanent monitoring of institutions to see if they are *not performing* as required, and the permanent monitoring of the implementing of policies to see if they are having undesirable consequences, are activities—and reflect a cast of mind—that come much more readily to radicals, of left and right, than they do to traditional conservatives. They also run counter to the way people working in institutions, especially those with authority, tend normally to behave. The normal tendency is to cover up organizational and administrative failures as much as possible, and to resist facing even to oneself the fact that one's activities are not having the desired effects. The Popperian approach, which requires one actively to seek out failures and shortcomings and do something about them, calls for a degree of intellectual honesty from politicians and administrators, as it does from scientists, that does not come to them at all easily, and constitutes a disconcerting personal challenge. What provides the incentive to meet this challenge is the higher success rate that results from doing so.

In fact a thoroughlygoingly problem-solving approach has many practical advantages, perhaps even more in politics than in science. It is far easier to get agreement on problems than on solutions, and a government that starts from the problem—let us say, to take a small but emotive example, the problem of what to do about the number of homeless people sleeping rough on the streets of London—and then shows itself open to alternative possible solutions will probably have not only a higher degree of practical success than one that starts with the answer, in other words a policy; it will also enjoy more support and goodwill, even from those who disagree with what it eventually does. In a democracy a great deal of electoral advantage is to be had from a problem-solving approach, because people will feel that they have been brought in.

And of course, if I may be forgiven for stating the obvious, a problem-solving approach directs one's attention to problems, and makes doing something about them the first priority. It protects one from being seduced into trying to build Utopia; and yet it does not easily allow one to relapse into complacency or inactivity. One's energies are channelled not into constructing ideal models but into removing avoidable evils. Popper encapsulates the first rule of thumb he recommends for public policy in the words 'Minimize avoidable suffering.' Psychologically it is a different approach from that of crusading for ideals, to which so many political activists are dedicated: it is more practical, and nearly always more fruitful. In any case the two are not necessarily incompatible. I am not opposed to idealists as such, but I do regard them with the gravest of suspicion. It is a fact that social evils have been perpetrated by idealists in our century on a simply stupendous scale that includes the deliberate murder of tens of millions of men and women and the herding of tens of millions more into forced labour camps (I am thinking not only of the Soviet Union but also of China, where the numbers involved may have been greater). These things could not possibly have been done by people who had adopted 'Minimize avoidable suffering' as their guiding principle. But they were done by idealists, and condoned all over the world by other idealists, more often than not with a sense of moral self-righteousness accompanied by savage denunciations of anyone who criticized what they were defending.

A point Popper makes which I stress more than he does is the unavoidability of unintended consequences. I stress them because they often dominate practical politics—as they soon came to do in all communist societies, for example. An awareness of them also immunizes us against enthusiasm for any form of centralization, especially centralized planning. To anyone engaged in practical affairs, business as well as politics, they are of never-ceasing importance. Only on someone divorced from reality can they fail to impinge.

Political lessons to be learnt from Popper are not confined to the problem-solving approach and its method. He has certain large-scale perceptions about politics that seem to me right and important although unfashionable. For instance, he perceives clearly that the societies in which we in the West are living in the 1900s are by all real (as against ideal) standards—that is to say by all the standards of past experience—exceptionally non-violent, as is the international scene as a whole. He also sees that for the great majority of men and women in the democratic West life is better

now than it has ever been before, not only materially but in the most important non-material ways, for example health, education, and cultural opportunity. He therefore sees clearly that the cultural pessimism so fashionable today, when intellectuals and artists are saying on all sides that we live in a uniquely terrible and violent time, presents more or less the opposite of the truth. I suspect that the illusion it represents has been brought about partially by the collapse of the historicist, progressivist illusions that were held earlier in the century by a great many of the same people, and to which Popper was equally opposed. On the face of it, it is peculiar that so many individuals who for decades believed with a kind of religious intensity that everything was getting better are now equally certain that everything is getting worse. But both attitudes are holistic and uncritical, and meet what seem to me primarily religious emotional needs. The fact is that the liberal democracies of the West are the only large societies in the whole of human history in which the great majority of the people have enjoyed not only material prosperity and literacy but also what have come to be known as fundamental human rights. This is a very recent historical phenomenon, and it is a wonderful thing. Even so, there is no contradiction at all between seeing this clearly for what it is and at the same time trying to improve these societies, and for that purpose adopting a radical and essentially critical stance in their political and social affairs. It happens to be the position I myself have always occupied, independently of Popper, and it is what first drew me to his work, before I knew anything about his epistemology or his philosophy of science.

Another overall perception of Popper's which I share is that equality of outcomes is not a desirable social goal. It took me a long time to learn this lesson, and when I did it was not from Popper but from my poor constituents in East London. They were almost entirely without social envy, which I came through them to realize is a largely middle class phenomenon anyway. They wanted a better deal for themselves—better wages, better houses, better schools for their children, and so on—but had no desire to pull down anyone who was better off. On the contrary, they actively rejected any such attitude; it ran counter to some of their most basic aspirations, more often for their children than for themselves. And they saw it as incompatible with elementary personal freedom. They were right in this. And it was also Popper's view. He once said that if a form of socialism could have been discovered which was compatible with personal freedom he would still be a socialist.

Another general attitude of Popper's that I loudly applaud in his

hostility to the tyranny of fashion in all its forms—the idea that we have to do certain things, or do things in certain ways, because these are the 1990s, and that we really have no choice, in that anything else is contrary to the spirit of the times, and therefore inappropriate, perhaps even inauthentic. This error is at its most predominant and destructive in the world of the arts, but it operates in politics too. In Britain after World War Two we had years of uncritical commitment to Keynesian economic management followed by uncritical commitment to monetarism; we had an uncritical belief in nationalization followed by an uncritical belief in privatization. Town planners guided by what they took to be the spirit of the times devastated the centres of many of Britain's most beautiful towns during the 1960s and 1970s, and corralled the poor of the inner cities into tower blocks. Anyone who opposed these developments at the time was denounced as conservative or reactionary, fuddy-duddy, out of date. Popper has always believed in either fighting or ignoring such tides of opinion. He sees them as forms of what another kind of philosopher would call 'false consciousness', and as ways of evading responsibility for our own decisions and our own actions. Insofar as we go along with them we are enemies of our own freedom. We can do *whatever* we can do, and it is up to us to do the best we can.

One of Popper's specific proposals that I think has great merit is that it should be accepted internationally as a fundamental principle that no existing frontier is to be changed except by peaceful negotiation. The point here is that nearly all the national frontiers in the world were established by force, usually either imposed on the vanquished by the victors in war or imposed on colonized peoples by imperialist powers; therefore if the fact that a frontier has been imposed without the consent of one of the parties is to be accepted as an excuse for that party to use violence to get it changed there would be justified wars breaking out all over the world all the time, several on each continent. This cannot be acceptable to the international community now. Existing frontiers, constituting as they do actually existing political reality, must be regarded by the United Nations as operative no matter how they were arrived at, and must be guaranteed by whatever international peace-keeping forces there are, unless a majority of those whose frontiers they are wish to change them by peaceful means.

Up to this point I have been endorsing Popper's approach and commending it to you. And the truth is I do believe it provides working politicians with rules of thumb of the utmost usefulness. But it does have, inevitably, limitations and shortcomings. The

chief limitation is that, being a methodology, it is almost entirely about method and not about content. The most pressing question facing the individuals who have to take important decisions is nearly always 'What should we do now?' Everyone else can stand back from that question and then criticize the way things are done, but the decision-makers themselves cannot. Only rarely does the Popperian approach help them towards an answer. This fact has recently come to the fore in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. To an extent rare in history they have found themselves with opportunities to build a new society that is radically different from the one they had before. Popper's philosophy offers them first-rate guidance about how to do things, but very little about what to do. What kind of local government, if any, do they want: at what level, how constituted, and with what powers? What kind of education system do they want, what sort of schools, how organized, by whom, teaching what? How much welfare state do they want, and in what areas—and how much can they actually afford: how is it to be administered, how funded? It is questions like these that constitute most of the content of large-scale practical politics.

In any case, most politics is not large-scale. When I became a Member of Parliament and began spending my days in the House of Commons among hundreds of other MPs, I was struck by the fact that, among themselves, they scarcely ever discussed the sort of political or social questions thrashed out in pubs and debating societies, like *are we in favour of the return of the death penalty*, or  *censorship*, or *nationalization*. The questions that held them in thrall were much more like: 'If we raise the widow's pension by half a percentage point where are we going to find those extra millions of pounds?' They would have differing views about such questions, and would argue heatedly, but these mostly were the sorts of questions they would be arguing about. And it is inevitable that these are the sorts of questions that day-to-day government has to concern itself with. It is seldom that Popper's work offers much guidance with them.

This in itself is not a criticism of Popper, because he is not talking to us on that level. From a philosopher a politician must expect strategic, not pragmatic, guidance. What I am drawing attention to is not a shortcoming but a limitation. It is, however, one that practical politicians are likely to be a lot more conscious of than other people.

Practical politicians are only for a very small part of the time concerned with putting principles into practice. Most of the time they are struggling to make the best they can of difficult, messy

and uncontrollable situations. I will give you an example of this that involves a conflict between me and Popper personally. I have already mentioned his conviction that the international community should impose an iron refusal to allow existing frontiers to be changed by force, and have given his reasons for it. Well, when the military junta then governing Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands, for which Britain was responsible in international law, and *de facto* war began, he telephoned me at the House of Commons in great passion, wanting me to urge the British Government to declare war formally on Argentina. I refused. What I said to him went roughly as follows. 'I agree that the Argentinians absolutely must be made to leave, by negotiation if possible but by force if necessary. And I will vote for the use of force if there is no other way. But I want to get them out with the minimum possible harm to everyone concerned, and I see this as a damage-limitation exercise. There happens to be a sizeable British community living permanently in Argentina that consists of tens of thousands of families, many of whom have been there since the nineteenth century. They have their own schools and other institutions, as well as their own homes, businesses and professional practices. If we declare war on Argentina, the Argentinian government may well intern them and confiscate their assets. Their whole world will be destroyed, and in many cases their individual lives will be ruined. I believe we can get the Argentinians out of the Falkland Islands without that happening—though only if we don't declare war.'

Popper, always willing to sacrifice himself to a principle, was willing to sacrifice others too, and would not agree with me. Not only did he continue to telephone me angrily throughout the Falklands war, always urging the same course of action on me; he continued to bring the subject up with me for the rest of his life, always maintaining that he had been right. I am convinced to this day he was wrong—and not only because what I wanted to happen did in fact happen. I fully acknowledge that it might not have done. But I am convinced that we were right to try. I re-emphasize that I was always completely in agreement with Popper that in no circumstances should Argentina be allowed to get away with the forcible annexation of the Falkland Islands. He and I differed only about how they were to be made to leave. But on this we differed profoundly. It was not the principle that was in dispute but the way it should be put into practice. Popper wanted commitment to the principle to be publicly proclaimed in a formal act. I saw this as unnecessary to the actual implementation of the principle and almost bound to be seriously damaging. So I saw my own approach as essentially practical and his as essentially theoretical—

but far too theoretical, culpably so, too little concerned with the actual lives of individual men, women and children. And I have to say, as an intellectual and academic myself, that I see this fault as all-pervading in the attitudes of intellectuals and academics to political and social matters, and as being an extremely serious, often debilitating fault. Also, having been a professional politician as well, I find the sense of personal superiority to politicians so commonly expressed by intellectuals and academics unfounded and misplaced, self-deluding.

This story of a clash between a political philosopher and a professional politician illustrates a point of profoundest importance. I do not believe that there are many people who hold Popper and his work in higher regard than I do; and I knew him well personally. As a professional politician I made conscious use of his methodology, and found it of extraordinary practical usefulness and fruitfulness. Yet any individual who, if only by his vote in an assembly, has to take responsibility for executive political decisions, is likely to find himself unable to put Popper's principles—or anybody else's principles, for that matter—into practice in a way that the originator of the principles would wholly approve of. This is because practice has unavoidable and compelling exigencies which theory can never encompass, and which those who are solely theoreticians seem only rarely to appreciate—and never fully to understand. But that would be a subject for a different paper.