

Crosby's Column

'Expert' Decision

By John Crosby

We are in the days of big government, which is to say executive government, or to put it less politely, bureaucratic government. Former President Eisenhower says he doesn't like it, although there was a good deal of it under this administration, too. Big government is probably unavoidable if we are to be as Augustan as Robert Frost says we are. But there are pitfalls.

On the bookshelves are two books, "The Cuban Invasion," by Karl Meyer and Tad Szulc, which is subtitled "The Chronicle of a Disaster," and "The U-2 Affair," by David Wise and Thomas B. Ross, which could well have had the same subtitle but didn't. Both those actions were executive decisions and both were marked by appalling stupidity. Both were largely controlled and run by the quote experts unquote with whom every one is afraid to tangle, because "they have the information." But, with all this information the quote experts unquote have been most grievously, appallingly, horribly wrong.

Just how wrong is best illustrated in Meyer's and Szulc's excellent book on the Cuban invasion when they describe a meeting of the National Security Council. Present were an impressive roster of experts and eggheads including Allen Dulles, Richard Bissell, Gen. Lemnitzer, Secretary of State Rusk, Secretary of Defense McNamara, Adolf Berle, Arthur Schlesinger, Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Mann, McGeorge Bundy, Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze, Secretary of the Treasury Douglas Dillon, and Senator Fulbright, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. And, of course, President Kennedy.

In attendance were the best brains of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the White House and the State Department. Only one man—Senator Fulbright—opposed a plan that any second lieutenant that ever graduated from the Infantry School at Fort Benning would have denounced as lunacy. Schlesinger was opposed to the plan because he didn't think it would work but nobody took his advice and he didn't feel like

putting his expertise against the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Yet, this is the very sort of amateur opinion which blinds a democracy and keeps it from making whopping blunders. In an age of atomic energy, missile warfare, and the rest of the god-awful gadgetry, plain people all defer to the experts with a monstrous and audible sigh of relief, "It's too complicated for me. Let the double-doubles in the Pentagon handle it." It is the attitude, but we can't evade our responsibilities in a democracy that easily.

The experts aren't that expert. What's more, they frequently disagree among themselves and then the common sense of the layman is usually far wiser. (It's interesting to note that in an essentially military operation, only two non-military men, Schlesinger and Fulbright, were against it.) Something happens to otherwise sensible people when protected by secrecy and high position from the searching criticism of debate, which most of the policies of big government are not getting.

For one thing, high principle goes out the window. In both the U-2 affair and the Cuban invasion the American government was caught in big, terribly embarrassing lies.

In "The Cuban Invasion," Meyer and Szulc quote Max Weber, the German sociologist and historian of bureaucracy, with stunning pertinence to our times: "Under normal conditions, the power position of a fully developed bureaucracy is always overpowering. The political master finds himself in the position of the 'dilettante' who stands opposite the 'expert' facing the 'tragedy' which stands within the management of the administration."

"Every bureaucracy seeks to increase the superiority of the professionally informed by keeping their knowledge and intentions secret. Bureaucratic dignitaries always tend to be an administration of their own decisions; in so far as it can, it seeks to acquire knowledge and wisdom from criticism. In a Parliament, the bureaucracy out of its power instinct, fights every attempt of Parliament to gain knowledge by means of its reports or from interest groups."

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