

## **Church Union and the Revolt against Bureaucracy**

In 1965 the 'Committees of Ten,' representing the Anglican Church of Canada and the United Church of Canada, brought many years of labour to what was commonly taken to be a triumphant conclusion. Their unanimous report, widely acclaimed as an ecumenical breakthrough, was accepted by the supreme governing bodies of the two churches, at the earliest opportunity and with surprisingly little controversy, as a basic statement of principles, and joint commissions were quickly set up to implement it in a comprehensive plan of union. These commissions are now working hard and (to all appearances) confidently at their complex task, and the firstfruits of their work will soon be available for public discussion. A number of responsible leaders on both sides now seem to believe that union may be achieved within five years.

Perhaps they are right – but in making their plans they will do well to take account of the doubts and fears currently being expressed in both churches. Admittedly, some of the opposition to Anglican-United Church union is purely obstructionist; we easily succumb to the temptation to put our own cherished customs and institutions first and the claims of the gospel and of Christian mission second. But even captious opposition must be squarely faced, especially when (as in the present instance) it can find legitimate difficulties and hesitations to feed upon.

One widespread and acute fear is linked with the present-day revolt against bureaucracies of all kinds. Rightly or wrongly, for many years the central administration of the United Church and the national and diocesan administrations of the Anglican Church have been under fire from their several constituencies. In today's climate of opinion and emotion the winds of anti-bureaucratic criticism are blowing more violently than ever before. To increasing numbers of active Christians the very notion of merging two distrusted bureaucracies is repugnant.

No doubt romantic anarchism is as stupid as uncritical establishmentarianism. But we do not need to be anarchists to see the dangers of bureaucracy: deafness to the voice of the community, blindness to the needs of individuals, and so forth. Surely it is reasonable to fear any increase of these evils within the Christian fellowship.

Such a fear may not be well founded, as far as the proposed union is concerned, but more than a few churchmen are waiting to be convinced. One good way of convincing them will be for those in positions of special responsibility to take care that every aspect of the union proposals is fully discussed and evaluated by – not just 'sold' to – the men and women who staff and maintain our local centres of Christian worship and action.

**E.R.F.**