

FALSE GODS

BY

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False gods worry me; they dissipate energy when worshipped, and they strain loyalties when exposed. So perhaps it is better to prevent deification by revealing feet of clay as soon as possible.

I am worried about 'repair by replacement'. It is becoming a god; will it be a false god; has it feet of clay? We all know its wonders; measurable maintenance periods, guaranteed trials behaviour, assured use of the right bits. These are the eyes and ears and smile of the idol. Perhaps we should lower our gaze and examine his feet.

Repair by replacement entails vast expenditure on replace parts, whether this is incurred in buying new bits or in mending the old ones, usually by special people with special gear in special places. And as these parts are no good unless they are in the right place at the right time, we are committed to a logistic system of immense complication—and also, therefore, of immense cost. Is high cost justifiable? In using public money, only if something in the public interest can be achieved no other way. Here the public interest spells military preparedness and I have serious doubts if repair by replacement achieves that military preparedness so assuredly as to justify its great cost. Cost is the left foot of our idol. Let us examine military preparedness, which is the right.

Can we hope to fight the next war with the logistic ideas of the last? Can we hope that our replace spares will always be in the right place at the right time? At the best of times, Eaglescliffe is a long way from the forward depots; imagine England in the turmoil of big weapons and the Fleet far from its depots to avoid these same weapons. Will the parts get through? And say the Fleet inconsiderately decides to have its depot elsewhere; does our ability to give it a base have to depend on the number of boxes of spares we can stagger along with?

Here the idol waggles a big toe and says 'You've forgotten that ships can take on special bits of spares if they are going on detached duty; the system allows for it and so does the number of spares provided.' And so, presumably, I ruminate, as I prod the left foot a bit, does the Exchequer, too. He must do. I remember preparing to go down to Palestine in a destroyer in 1947. What will happen if our motor cutter engine breaks down? The god smiled and gave us a spare engine to take along. A spare engine, mind you, when previously we had carried an extra piston and a set of bearings! Who benefited? Certainly not our preparedness; certainly not the taxpayer.

So neither foot looks very healthy to me.

Wouldn't it be better to go all simple-minded about this thing—if we can't have staff able to mend today's complicated bits, can't the designers introduce simpler bits? If simpler bits mean lower performance, shouldn't we assess this against non-availability in war? If there won't be any base facilities in the vital times of another war, shouldn't we learn to do without them now? Wouldn't this save money?—a wry smile on the face of the idol when I say that this could mean closing Eaglescliffe. 'After all the years I've spent building it up!' he gasps. Which enables me to remark that having something is no justification for keeping it.

Come to think, that might be the reason why we still have repair by replacement.

Perhaps it would be honest for us to start all over again in thinking how best to maintain the Fleet. I would like to see the case argued in these pages. I will even put a comforting arm around the idol while it is going on, partly to prevent his protagonists making use of his existence to state their case. Also it will give me a right to be in at his burial.

But my coat tail has clay on it, so I must stop. Anyway it is bedtime.