EXTRAITS DU LIVRE DE CHARLES GRANT
" THE HOUSE THAT JACQUES BUILT". 1994.

JACQUES DELORS

DELORS'S EXOCET

Delors owes much of his success in Brussels to Pascal Lamy, his *chef de cabinet* from January 1985 to May 1994, who planned and implemented the presidential regime. Lamy's intellect, energy, efficiency and forcefulness invariably impress those who meet him. Lamy chose and trained the president's cabinet as an elite squad of commandos, dedicated to enforcing the president's will. A political scientist who studied Delors's cabinet noted that their task was 'to make the commission function more like a real government and less like a college, while simultaneously preserving the collegiate forms and ethos.'[1]

Delors's cabinet monitors and guides the work of the other commissioners, their cabinets and the directorates-general. One member will follow the environment, a second energy, a third social policy, and so on. Delors' cabinet also helps the secretariat-general with its task of coordination, feeds the president with ideas and information, and liaises with EC governments.

Lamy exercised more power than most of the commissioners, and he terrified many officials. Tall and lean, with a crew cut and a square jaw, he has the appearance and the manner of a French paratrooper (although he spent his national service in the navy). His military brusqueness allows little time for small talk. He speaks concisely, precisely and slowly, in a deep, gruff voice.

Lamy's working method was simple. Each day he cleared his desk before going home. This meant he worked very fast, kept meetings short, and refused lunch invitations. Lamy's incessant glancing at his wristwatch reminded his visitor to hurry up. A man of speed, Lamy ran several times a week in the Forêt de Soigne and several times a year in marathons.

Large photos of the family château – in the department of Eure, Normandy – covered his office wall. Hailing from this prosperous area, where he was born in 1947, Lamy has a different *Weltanschauung* from Delors. Lamy does not get sentimental about French peasants. He is more enthusiastic about free trade and GATT, and tempered some of Delors's hostility to the Japanese. Childhood holidays with British families have given him an impressive command of English.

Lamy gets on easily with the British and the Americans in a way Delors does not. Lamy's close friendship with Robert Zoellick – chief aide to James Baker, President Bush's secretary of state – proved useful for Delors. So did Lamy's close relationships with Joachim Bitterlich, Kohl's adviser on Europe, and Elizabeth Guigou, who played that role for Mitterrand and later become France's minister for Europe. Lamy oversaw

Delors's links with other governments and acted as his 'sherpa' before G7 summits. Although Lamy and Delors did not always share the same views, they never came close to falling out. 'We discuss, we don't argue,' said Lamy. 'Once he knows what I think, it's he who takes the decisions.'[2]

In 1975 Lamy graduated second in his year at the Ecole Nationale d'Administration – where he had befriended Martine Delors. He then became an *Inspecteur des Finances* and an active member of Delors's club Echange and Projets. In 1981 Delors gave him a job in his cabinet, soon making him deputy *chef*. In 1983 Pierre Mauroy, the prime minister, poached Lamy as his deputy *chef*, with responsibility for the government's austerity package.

Delors rehired Lamy on his appointment to the commission. Lamy spent the autumn of 1984 in a small commission office, gathering information on how the bureaucracy worked. He designed the *système Delors* to suit the strengths and weaknesses of both the commission and its president.

> *From my experience of working with Delors, I knew what he liked and didn't like doing, and what he could and could not do. It was like designing a custom-built racing car for a driver who has particular skills. If you want to make good use of Delors's resources, you should leave strategy, communication and negotiation to him, and let the system take care of the rest.*[3]

Lamy's role was to run the administration, which has never interested Delors, and to be ruthless when necessary, for, as Lamy says, 'Delors dislikes blood'.[4] Delors sometimes sent Lamy to argue with a commissioner rather than do it himself.

Lamy also had to push the president to take decisions. Delors is inclined to prevaricate. In the first three months of 1993, Leon Brittan, the commissioner for external relations (economic) and Hans van den Broek, the commissioner for external relations (political) argued over who would do what. Their often public dispute made the commission appear ridiculous. Delors kept his distance for too long before knocking heads together. Significantly, Lamy was absent for much of that period, campaigning in France's parliamentary elections (he stood as a Socialist in Eure, but won fewer votes than the National Front).

Lamy was often a delight to work for. He gave cabinet members the freedom to manage their portfolios as they saw fit. He supported them in their battles within the commission. Wherever in the world he was, he would respond to a colleague's note in minutes.

Yet he could also be a brutish taskmaster. He expected everyone else to work as hard as he did – which was an average of 12 or 13 hours a day, six days a week. He would call a cabinet member at home at the weekend, and without bothering to use such a superfluous word as 'hello', ask why he or she was not in the office. Joly Dixon, who covered EMU in the Delors cabinet from 1987 to 1992, says: 'When I first met Lamy, what struck me as odd was that he assumed anyone can do anything instantly. Then I discovered that there were a whole lot who could – *énarques*.'[5]

Lamy shared Delors's obsession with frugality. The cabinet did not hold birthday or leaving parties. Members did not turn up at diplomatic soirées. In September 1993 Lamy confessed that in all his time in Brussels he had held only two parties and attended five.[6] On a rare occasion when the author persuaded Lamy to leave his office for lunch, he would eat only rice and lentils in the staff canteen.

Leon Brittan meets his cabinet daily, as a group. The Delors team is more hierarchical. Apart from a weekly lunch which Delors occasionally attends, cabinet members do not see each other together. Nor do they see the president unless he happens to be working on their subject. The *chef de cabinet* alone has an overview of the cabinet's work.

The point of this hierarchy is to save the president time. Most modern politicians are, essentially, managers, whose work revolves around meetings and briefings from staff. Delors likes to spend time by himself, reading, thinking and writing. But the hierarchy harms team spirit. Cabinet members have seldom had a please or thank you from Delors or Lamy. Only the strongest personalities flourish in such a high-pressure environment; several have dropped out after a year.

Delors and Lamy worked symbiotically. Lamy's cool and sober temperament balanced Delors's changeable emotions. Lamy's down-to-earth realism restrained Delors' flights of fancy. Jérôme Vignon, head of the Cellule de Prospective, says that Lamy's role was to listen to Delors's 20 ideas and tell him which was the one which would work.

Delors says simply of Lamy, 'I wouldn't have made it without him.' Delors offers this list of Lamy's virtues:

> *an impeccable working method, a very good headhunter, a great ability to learn and the temperament of a leader. He's one of the few top administrators who doesn't base their power and influence on knowing things they hide from others. As soon as he knows or does something, he writes a note to the cabinet. That's the key to the good functioning of a team.*

Delors praises Lamy for decentralising work to members of the cabinet, noting that he himself has a tendency to want to do everything.[7]

Explaining his need for Lamy, Delors says:

> *I trust people and my ideas, I don't see blows coming, I don't analyse things realistically. If one was nasty one would say I was a bit naïve. Lamy is from my daughter's generation, these people are much more realistic than me.*[8]

Lamy helped Delors to guard his moral image. When something nasty happened in the commission, people assumed Lamy and not Delors was responsible.

Lamy set the style – aggressive, dedicated and frugal – for the Delors cabinet, which, in turn, transmitted these values to many other parts of the commission. Having been bashed by Lamy – and sometimes Delors – members of the cabinet bashed those in other cabinets and in the directorates-general. The justification was simple: there was no other way to get things done, given the president's relatively weak formal powers.

One member of Delors's cabinet chairs every meeting of the 'special *chefs*'. He or she will have read all the relevant files the night before, unlike many others at the meeting. The Delors representative may tell an awkward official that his attitude is 'harmful to the construction of Europe' – a euphemism for saying the president will get annoyed if you do not back down. Thus the Delors line often prevails.

Some of the weaker commissioners, such as Vasso Papandreou, responsible for social affairs from 1989 to 1992, had to put up with Delors's cabinet virtually running parts of their portfolio. One cabinet member recounts that a commissioner

> *was doing stupid things. So we had to 'rape' him and work directly with the directorate-general to achieve our ends . . . The president advised me not to do it, but because of the job I had to interpret that to mean I should do it but make sure there was not too much noise.*[9]

François Lamoureux, Delors's deputy *chef de cabinet* from 1989 to 1991, played a key role in the imposition of presidential discipline. Known as 'the ayatollah' for his fervent federalism, Lamoureux is a fearsome debater. His ruthless logic and caustic criticism often traumatised those who crossed him.

Lamy was unashamed of the regime he and Delors created: 'As Delors likes ideas a bit more than power, if the system is to work well I have to focus

a bit more on power than ideas.'[10] Lamy's apparent obsession with power has led some to speculate that he believes in nothing. Yet that speculation is, in a sense, a tribute to Lamy. 'He is a superb civil servant because he gets things done for his master without pursuing his own agenda,' said Peter Sutherland, who dubbed Lamy 'Delors's Exocet'. He added, with some uncertainty: 'I would not say he does not have a heart.'[11]

Lamy says he is a socialist and a Catholic, but that his faith is less strong than Delors's. He says he reads Mounier, though less than Delors. He says he has a strong sense of guilt, but that it is less extreme than Delors's. Did it bother him that cabinet members complained they seldom saw their children? 'Yes . . . probably we've made the job too much of a priority – because it's so absorbing, because we believe that we can achieve something – compared with family needs. It's not a system I'm very happy about.'[12]

Delors can appear more human than Lamy, and may even ask after his staff's children. One weekend he rang a member of the cabinet at home and told him to come into the office to finish some work. 'But my wife is away, so I have to look after the children,' was the reply. 'Bring them,' said the president. While the official worked, Delors crawled around on his office floor with the children.

But even in a good mood Delors finds fault in almost every document he receives, particularly in the details. In May 1991 Delors delivered a speech to the Senegalese parliament, but afterwards felt it had been a poor one. So he harangued the cabinet member who had written the speech and kicked his own briefcase hard. But usually Delors fumes rather than shouts when he is angry. He will say very little and then make a barbed comment like: 'I'm not blaming you, but if only we had put in a bit more effort.' He feels guilty when he is not working and has a gift for making his staff feel the same.

'The British and German cabinets in the commission are more convivial,' says one member of Delors's cabinet. 'Even if I've finished work I feel I ought to stay in the office.' Cabinet members are desperate to impress the president. Underneath their sober, determined exteriors, they suffer hot jealousies. Each member counts the number of presidential smiles, comments or calls he receives, compared with his colleagues.

Delors is at his most unreasonable before a big event such as a summit or a television interview, when, in front of others, even Lamy was liable to be branded as incompetent. Delors admits to having 'a very fragile nervous system'. He says that when he overworks he has no warning mechanism, and that he does not see exhaustion looming. 'And then I pay, with moments of depression. Then I mustn't take decisions for half a day.'[13]

Delors is not a man to say sorry. Yet the most bludgeoned cabinet members remain loyal, for they share a militant ethos. They want to work harder than other officials, to be better prepared, to think further ahead and to do whatever is necessary to enforce the president's will. They are committed, body and soul, to a unique figure and his goal of European union.

The commission became a more spritely and powerful machine with Delors in the driving seat. Thus by the end of 1988 the commission had published 90 per cent of the draft laws it had promised in the 1992 programme. As the EC's fortunes revived in the late 1980s, officials began to work harder. They were delighted to have a star at their head, whose views were respected beyond Europe. The Delors regime – at least until 1992 – nurtured their idealism and creativity. Many of those bullied and bruised by the Delors cabinet nevertheless granted it a sullen respect. They knew the EC could not have achieved so much without Delors and Lamy converting the unwieldy, unfocused and unhurried bureaucracy into one capable, if pushed, of acting with speed and efficiency.

RAISON D'ÉTAT

Delors's system of command and control depends on more than his cabinet. Ever since January 1985 Delors and Lamy have placed their own men in key posts, creating a network of supporters. The point of the Delors network, like the cabinet, is to gather information and to carry out the president's wishes.

In 1987 Delors installed Jean-Louis Dewost, a Frenchman, as head of the legal service – displacing a German. From then on political considerations were more likely to colour that service's advice. If Delors disagreed with another commissioner's proposal, an opinion from the legal service would, on occasion, help him to win the argument. When Leon Brittan was competition commissioner, the legal service sometimes parried his efforts to make French companies repay state aid.

Until 1990 the commission's chief spokesman and the president's spokesman were different people. In that year Bruno Dethomas, a former *Le Monde* journalist and Delors's spokesman, took on the additional role of chief spokesman. Henceforth Delors's interests in media management equalled those of the commission. When Leon Brittan's spokesman put out press releases on illegal subsidies to French companies, they were sometimes rewritten lest too tough a tone embarrass Delors in France. In March 1993, when the commission reached an agreement with the Japanese on that year's level of car imports, the spokesmen's service stressed that the number of imports would fall. Another spin – less pleasing to French

sensibilities – could have been that Japan's share of the EC car market would rise.

Most of the 650 journalists accredited to the commission treat its president with a great deal of respect. The French press almost never criticise Delors. Those that do offend are liable to be punished. In June 1993 the Brussels correspondent of *Libération* wrote an innocuous preview of the Copenhagen summit. The article ended by saying that Delors's initiative on job creation 'could well be a huge flop'. Tame stuff, but the piece followed another which had compared the president to the emperor with no clothes. Shortly afterwards Delors dined with Serge July, the editor of *Libération*, and criticised the correspondent at length. Lamy then forbade members of the cabinet to talk to the man from *Libération*.

In 1989 Delors appointed Jérôme Vignon to head the Cellule de Prospective, the commission think tank. Vignon is strongly committed to the social teaching of the Catholic church and is, among those close to Delors, the least enamoured of free markets. The Cellule has provided Delors with papers on issues ranging from energy taxes, to the future of the welfare state, to the theological antecedents of the principle of subsidiarity.

The boundaries between Delors's cabinet and the Cellule are blurred, as are those between the cabinet and the secretariat-general. When Delors arrived in Brussels the secretary-general was Emile Noël, a wily Frenchman who had had the job since 1958. Inclined to secrecy, Noël would sort out a problem between two commissioners by mediating behind the scenes. Although not a methodical manager, Noël supplied the institution with some of the political vision which the commissioners often lacked. Noël's retirement in September 1987 left no serious counterweight to Lamy's power over the administration.

Noël's British replacement, David Williamson, could not have been more different. Williamson is an efficient, self-effacing and conscientious administrator, with an impish sense of humour. He has tried, with partia success, to impose a more open and regular style of management. But tru to the traditions of the British civil service whence he came, Williamson i not a politician *manqué* who is eager to push a personal strategy.

Ironically, the British Williamson has become more enmeshed in th Delors network than the French Noël ever was. Delors has total confidenc in Williamson's loyalty. Every day he sees the secretary-general two three times (more than anyone else except his *chef de cabinet*) and sends hi a dozen notes or queries. Williamson has not stood up to Delors or Lam but, as one director-general puts it, 'how can any official stand up to the except by resigning?'

Those close to Leon Brittan are particularly critical of Williamson for having allowed Lamy to rewrite the minutes of commission meetings. The written record matters, for it may be referred to at a later date – when people have forgotten what was said and decided – to justify an action or an argument. An official of the secretariat-general takes the minutes of the commission, of the *chefs de cabinet* and of the 'special *chefs*'. The secretariat-general sends drafts of all these minutes to the president's cabinet, who may make changes. For instance, if two *chefs de cabinet* spoke for a presidential proposal, and five spoke against, the presidential cabinet might alter the minutes to read that a majority spoke in favour. Or, after an evenly balanced argument, opinions which conflicted with the president's could receive less space. The changes are usually distortions rather than inventions.

The Delors cabinet returns the minutes to the secretariat-general, which sends them on to other cabinets. If the Brittan cabinet, say, did not like the minutes, they could ask Williamson to alter them. Williamson would then have talked to Lamy. If the outcome did not satisfy Brittan, he could have raised the matter at the next commission meeting. But Brittan would not have been sure of winning his point, for many commissioners think twice before opposing Delors. Brittan may therefore have preferred a compromise whereby Lamy agreed to some changes but not to others.

Sometimes substantial issues are at stake. The competition directorate vetted state aid in poorer regions by one set of criteria; the regional directorate used another set to decide each region's eligibility for EC funds. In December 1991 Delors sought to harmonise the two sorts of criteria, while Brittan fought to keep the competition directorate's own rules. Brittan believed he had won the argument, but the commission's minutes said he had lost. Williamson refused to change the minutes and the dispute dragged on for months. Eventually the Brittan cabinet offered concessions on another subject in order to obtain partial satisfaction.

Lamy denies stories of the minutes being rewritten. 'It's not by fabricating the minutes that one holds on to power. The minutes of the commission are always approved by the college.'[14] But he has told colleagues that in an efficient system of government the minutes have to be 'managed'.

Delors's network extends beyond the commission. On 28 October 1987, in the aftermath of the biggest stockmarket crash since 1929, Delors addressed the European Parliament:

> *If the Americans are unable to obtain an assurance of increased growth in Europe, will they not seek to apply pressure by means of the falling*

dollar? . . . Let there be no illusions, the Americans are prepared to let it drop as far as DM1.60.[13]

Delors's words caused the dollar to dip two pfennigs to DM1.73. Several finance ministers rebuked him for speaking out of turn. Lamy appeared in the Brussels press room to say Delors had been misquoted. Then he sent one of Delors's cabinet to the Brussels office of the European Parliament. The envoy hunted down a Monsieur Parfait, the Frenchman who edited reports of parliamentary proceedings, and bullied him into deleting the offending words. The report of 28 October was printed and on the point of distribution – when Lord Henry Plumb, the parliament's British president, discovered Lamy's ruse. He ordered the report's destruction and told Parfait to start again with the true text.

Any official who is French, socialist and competent, with a useful area of expertise, is almost certain to be invited into the Delors network. Anyone with a couple of those qualities would be seriously considered, as long as one of them is competence. Membership varies according to the subject under discussion. 'Often, one doesn't understand why someone argues a particular line – then later on you realise the Delors cabinet had phoned their friends in advance,' says one of Brittan's team.

The 'Delors mafia', as its enemies call it, has strengthened during Delors's second and third commissions. Riccardo Perissich, an able Italian and a Delors loyalist, became director-general for the single market in 1990. Jean-Louis Cadieux, a friend of Lamy's, became deputy director-general for Eastern Europe in the same year. In 1993 Gunter Burghardt, Delors's deputy *chef de cabinet* in his first commission, became head of the new directorate-general for foreign policy.

Delors had less need of a network during his first term as president, when the initial successes bound the commissioners together. Delors could count on senior figures such as Lorenzo Natali, Lord Cockfield and Willy de Clercq to be loyal, and his authority was seldom challenged. In his second term Delors found it harder to make his views prevail. Commissioners who came on board in 1989, when the ship was sailing forwards with a fair wind – such as Leon Brittan, the competition commissioner – felt no special obligation to support the president. Delors missed Natali, who had acted as a peacemaker, and found himself outvoted more often.

For instance in April 1991, during a commission debate on the farm budget, Delors proposed raising the statutory ceiling on farm spending by 1.3 billion ecus (£900 m). He argued it would cost that much to integrate former East Germany into the Common Agricultural Policy. Ray

Europe and feel self-confident about it, 'so it comes naturally to them, rather than being vainly self-serving, to say that Europe should be as France would wish it to be.'[23]

UNTAMED MONSTER

As Delors's presidency entered its third and final term, in January 1993, commission officials began to speculate that his style of government was doing more harm than good. 'By relying excessively on informal channels, the formal channels have become atrophied and the morale of the senior officials has suffered,' was one view. Such words might be expected from a director-general who had suffered from cronyism. But they came from a long-serving member of the Delors cabinet. He thinks the commission's poor morale in 1992 and 1993 can only partly be blamed on the external shocks – economic recession, the Yugoslav war and Denmark's *Nej* to Maastricht – which damaged the EC. He believes the institution would have better weathered the crisis if the Delors network had not undermined its structures and stability.

A member of the Brittan cabinet says any good president would need a network. 'He cannot rely solely on his fellow commissioners or on directors-general, for some of them will be incompetent, or display national prejudice, or simply not be on the same wavelength.' He says that if Delors is going to brainstorm with the best people he has to use unorthodox channels. But he regrets that Delors has 'established a largely *franco-français* network, thus departing from a truly European spirit.'

Many commission officials believe the power of the cabinets and the networks has increased, is increasing and ought to be diminished. When Delors arrived in Brussels he promised the directors-general he would restore their authority. Yet he has done nothing to restrain the cabinets' power, and in 1989 even increased the size of each from five to six officials.

Today's directors-general are often preparers of files for their commissioners rather than true advisers. The ablest believe they are an under-used resource. Delors seldom consults a director-general on a major initiative unless he is in the network. Delors's speech to the directors-general in February 1991 did nothing for their morale. 'If I could hire and fire, I'd get after at least five or six of you,' he said. 'I know which ones among you don't take me seriously. Here you're all bosses, it's hard to shake you up, but I'll get you none the less.' He even singled out the heads of DGIII and DGIV – two of the ablest directors-general – for criticism. They had provoked Delors's rage by blocking a paper on aid for electronics firms. The outburst had its desired effect: the electronics paper soon passed.[24]

MacSharry, the farm commissioner, opposed Delors and won the vote. When Delors said he would not defend the result in public, MacSharry asked if he was refusing to accept a collegiate decision. Delors snapped back that he would not take moral lessons from MacSharry. Delors later retaliated by ordering Lamy to break off communications between his cabinet and the Irishman's team. Luckily for Joly Dixon, whose wife worked with MacSharry, the order was soon forgotten.

Delors and his cabinet became increasingly dependent on the network, especially when important tasks had to be carried out rapidly. In July 1989, when the Paris G7 summit asked the commission to coordinate the West's aid to Eastern Europe, Delors mobilised the network rather than the directors-general. The secretariat-general and the president's cabinet wrote most of the budgetary plans which Delors launched in 1987 and 1992. The network drafted the commission's contributions to the inter-governmental conferences of 1986 and 1991. The commissioners did not even see the draft treaty on EMU – published in their name in December 1991 – before they read about it in the newspapers. Delors did not consult other commissioners before making a presentation on European competitiveness to the Copenhagen summit of June 1993.

The Delors cabinet justifies all this centralisation in the name of efficiency. If every commissioner could propose amendments to presidential initiatives, the results would be watered down and meaningless, says one member. 'You can't delegate much while there is no constitutional means of exerting authority.'

Any commissioner who wishes to make a proposal at a commission meeting must – according to the rules – notify the president's cabinet 10 days in advance. This allowed Lamy effective control of the agenda. If he disliked a proposal he would badger the commissioner's cabinet to withdraw it. Only the strongest of commissioners, such as Brittan, generally resisted such pressure.

In France's administrative tradition, geographical and organisational centralisation is regarded as a virtue. *Hauts fonctionnaires* have fewer qualms about the ends justifying the means than they do in some countries. The tradition values strategic thinking.

But Delors and Lamy have done much more than import the French tradition to Brussels. They have transformed a horizontal power structure into a vertical one, resembling a steep pyramid. The secretariat-general, the president's cabinet and Delors form the apex. Brittan is one of the few commissioners to have established a foothold on the upper slopes of the pyramid. The weaker commissioners languish at the bottom, excluded from the decisions which matter.

Delors has dabbled with reform at various times during his presidency. In 1991 Carlo Trojan, the Dutch deputy secretary-general, drew up a report on the commission's inadequacies. Its hint that the cabinets had too many staff annoyed enough commissioners to ensure that the report gathered dust. In the summer of 1993 Delors held a series of meetings with the directors-general to discuss the workings of the commission. As a result they won the right to discuss policy initiatives as a group, and a little more power to reorganise their departments.

The president's meagre formal powers undoubtedly make reform of the commission a daunting task. Decisions which national prime ministers would take on their own must, in Brussels, pass the college of 17 commissioners. Yet if Delors had made reform a priority, he could surely have cajoled the commissioners to support him. Other more interesting subjects have always grabbed the president's attention.

Neither Delors nor Lamy nor Williamson has tried to tackle the fundamentals of what is wrong with the commission – whose running costs in 1993 totalled 2.3 billion ecus (£1.8 billion). For instance the number of directorates could be reduced, to prevent duplication of resources. Some of the departments which administer existing policies rather than plan new ones could become autonomous agencies. If the influence of cabinets on promotions was reduced, ability would count for more; an independent appointments body could ensure a fair balance among the nationalities.

Most commissioners have no idea how odious their institution can appear to outsiders – consultants, lobbyists, researchers, business people, recipients of regional aid or anyone searching for information – who have to deal with it. During 1991 and 1992 the senior partner of a leading Brussels law firm sent 25 letters to commissioners and directors-general, on various problems, and had five replies.

The commission is much better at drafting laws and proposing programmes than managing the results. 'Phare' and 'Tacis', which are, respectively, the EC's aid programmes for Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, show how much the commission still needs to learn about management. The commission's administration of these programmes – together worth 5 billion ecus (£3.6 billion) in the four years 1990–93 – has been shambolic.

Procedures for project approval are so slow that, by April 1993, only 70 per cent of Tacis's funds for 1991 had been spent. The commission has annoyed the Russians and the East Europeans by refusing to consult them over which consultants should be chosen to run projects. Those hired often receive contracts from the commission 6–12 months after starting work. They are typically paid 3–12 months late. The management of these pro-

grammes is so overcentralised that project managers have to refer the minutest of decisions to Brussels – where overworked officials may take months to reply. Phare and Tacis have undoubtedly done some good. But many of the East Europeans and Russians experiencing these programmes complain that the commission's slowness, inefficiency, arrogance and unhelpfulness remind them of their old regimes.[25]

Lamy concedes that the Delors system has concentrated too much on taking short-cuts to get things done.

> *Probably we should have changed the structure of the institution, but we thought it wasn't a priority. The problem is that officials spend too much time managing tasks and not enough time on the tasks themselves. The circuits are too complicated, there's too much paper. The bureaucratic noise of the house is too loud compared with what it produces.*[26]

Lamy has only praise for Williamson but others in the Delors entourage blame the Briton for not trying harder to reform the commission. One says:

> *The cabinet has tried to concentrate on strategy, leaving the management of the house to the secretariat-general. Williamson is a very good transmission channel but, as a typical British civil servant, he hasn't had the strategic vision that would have enabled him to shake up the system.*

Williamson's defenders reply that neither he nor anyone else could have undertaken major reforms without Delors's express support.

The centralisation of the Delors system should be kept in perspective. Brittan says:

> *Compared to the British cabinet, the commission is infinitely less centralised. More information is made available to commissioners than is to British ministers. Delors sometimes loses votes and he doesn't always use his influence to the full: he will often ask the commissioner responsible to introduce a debate, and not speak himself until the end. But he should talk more to colleagues, rather than rely on his cabinet. Their behaviour is not improper, but it can be unattractive and counter-productive.*[27]

Officials outside the network sometimes feel gratitude towards it. One of the ablest directors-general – who has never had a *tête-à-tête* with Delors

or Lamy – has had to contend with a weak commissioner and an obstructive cabinet. On several occasions, when the director-general has sought help from a member of the president's cabinet, the obstacle has been removed.

Delors has listened to criticism of his governance:

> *The pyramidal structure became too strong. It's true that Lamy held the system in an iron grip, to change it. But this authoritarianism was necessary for a while, since nothing worked.*

He says that in December 1992, just before the start of his third commission, he asked his cabinet to loosen its grip for two reasons. First, his own authority, inside and outside the commission, had been grievously damaged by the GATT rows of November 1992. Second, 'I wanted to let the new commissioners bloom, to see how it worked out.'[28]

The style of Delors's cabinet had already mellowed, following the departure of Lamoureux in July 1991. His replacement as deputy *chef de cabinet*, Jean-Pierre Jouyet, was a gentler soul. Delors says:

> *After the pyramidal phase there is a phase of relaxing the constraints, to try and get more collegial behaviour. That implies that my collaborators don't reign by terror, that they're a bit more open and that they refer to me before hitting hard.*

By the summer of 1993 Delors was grumbling that the softening had slowed the commission's capacity to take decisions.[29] But the relaxation continued when, in May 1994, Lamy left the commission to take on the number two job at Crédit Lyonnais. Jouyet became *chef de cabinet*.

However much Delors's mind has focused on loftier matters, he has known about the methods used by Lamy and his band and must take responsibility. It is ironic that Delors's public image in many countries is that of an arch-bureaucrat. For Delors is a natural dreamer, thinker, strategist and negotiator, who prefers to leave bureaucracy – and dirty work – to others.