The loss of power by parliaments is by now proverbial. 100 years ago, in the classical parliamentary constitutional system, the cabinet was responsible to parliament and the latter was always in a position to force a minister to resign by voting against the executive on an important issue. Today it is the rule that the cabinet or even the chief executive forces his will on the legislature. As soon as the question of confidence is put, the majority rarely dares raise its voice. Strict parliamentary party discipline enforces conformity and at times seems to turn the "back-benchers" into voting robots.

The individual representative is further faced with the threat of a dissolution of parliament and new elections, which he is bound to lose if his powerful party organization no longer nominates and supports him. Thus the parliamentary system of government has undergone a profound change in function: It now exists primarily to insure the preponderance and stability of the executive at the expense of the legislative branch. The latter is in danger of losing its aboriginal rights (such as the control over the budget, the right to initiate legislation, the control of government and administration) - to the executive branch. It is also losing them to the most powerful pressure groups which fill positions in parliamentary committees with their representatives and exercise direct pressure on chiefs of governments, ministers, and bureaucrats.

Indeed, the strengthening of the executive is not always identical with a strengthening of the cabinet. Oftentimes power is shifted still further to a civil service unaccessible to public control as well as to the big pressure groups collaborating with it. In view of the growing administrative tasks of the state, this new emphasis seems natural. It is rather increased in some countries by a transfer of important political and economic functions from the national to the so-called supranational institutions and their bureaucratic agencies. As mentioned before, most prominent among the causes for this shift in power is the militarisation of the major powers in connection with the cold war.

Nevertheless we should not overlook the fact that the trend towards centralization has not totally destroyed all countervailing forces. Present-day England is a good example in point. Recent developments show that the voter is at times offered genuine alternatives; that, there, a real competition takes place between programmatic parties and that, if the party in power marshals no more than a bare majority, parliament again gains in importance. Moreover, in countries such as England the influence of public opinion is considerable. In addition, the parties still grant sufficient internal democracy so that the member and deputy of a major party can make himself heard.