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BUREAUCRACIES: SOME CONTRASTS IN SYSTEMS

WALLACE S. SAYRE

IN Western political systems there appear to be two important types of myths about bureaucracy. The first of these casts bureaucracy in the role of villain. Thus Harold Laski, writing thirty years ago on *bureaucracy* for the Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, described bureaucracy as representing a passion for the routine in administration, the sacrifice of flexibility to rule, delay in the making of decisions, and a refusal to embark upon experiment. Laski saw bureaucracy as a threat to democratic government. His argument ran briefly as follows: the scale of modern government makes administration by experts inescapable, yet the power of these experts as bureaucrats is not easily controlled by democratic institutions. The bureaucracies continuously push the boundaries of their power, Laski asserts, while control over them becomes increasingly difficult and costly. Describing the problem in terms of the British parliamentary system, he says control takes the following form: (1) the legislature can only reject or accept the proposals of ministers, (2) the ministers are in turn dependent upon their bureaucracies, and (3) the bureaucrats urge the ministers toward caution, toward minimizing innovation. The net influences, then, are in the direction of reliance on precedent, of continuity,

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and of minimum risk or change. More recently Von Mises, too, in his book called *Bureaucracy*, has argued that bureaucracy cannot be efficient, primarily because the profit-and-loss criterion is absent from the work of governmental bureaucracies.

A second type of myth casts bureaucracy in the role of hero. Max Weber is perhaps the outstanding proponent of this view. Weber argues that bureaucracy is capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency and the most rational form of administration. This is so, he believes, because it represents the exercise of control through knowledge. He presents an "ideal type" of bureaucracy in which activities are distributed in a fixed way, authority to command is distributed in a stable manner and is delimited by rules, the hierarchy of authority is monocratic, management is based on written documents, and membership in the bureaucracy is a vocation. In these terms bureaucracy is made virtually synonymous with rationality and objectivity in the administration of large-scale organizations.

We may describe these broad characterizations of bureaucracy as myths because they are persuasive mixtures of both fact and invention. As such they explain both too much and too little. A more modest version might simply assert that bureaucracy is necessarily neither villain nor hero, but rather a phenomenon found in all large-scale, complex organizations. This phenomenon has certain major characteristics: (1) specialization of tasks for the members of the organization, (2) a hierarchy of formal authority, (3) a body of rules, (4) a system of records, and (5) personnel with specialized skills and roles. In this view bureaucracy is a system for the administration of scale and complexity in human efforts to develop and accomplish purposes not otherwise attainable. In serving these purposes bureaucracy has both merits and liabilities. But we may assume that, within broad limits, these merits or liabilities are the result of choices made in constructing the bureaucratic system in a particular time and place. For bureaucracies are not all constructed in the same mould. Instead they vary greatly, one from the other, and they vary also over time. The American bureaucracies differ significantly from the British, and the British from the European, while presumably each of these Western bureaucracies differs importantly from the Eastern ones, which in

turn must differ greatly from each other. And "new" bureaucracies apparently differ in many ways from "mature" bureaucracies.

It is with the choices about the forms and methods of bureaucracy that this essay will be concerned, not with the probably unanswerable and somewhat metaphysical question of whether bureaucracy is villain or hero. It will be assumed that it may, in some periods and some places, be either or a mixture of both. And the discussion will focus upon three specific questions about bureaucracies:

1. How are the bureaucrats to be chosen?
2. What is the role of bureaucrats in decision-making?
3. How are the bureaucrats to be governed?

II

How are bureaucrats – especially the higher-ranking bureaucrats – to be chosen? The full answer to this question involves several important choices in public policy, choices which have major consequences for the nature and behaviour of the bureaucracy which will be developed. That is, the ways in which the bureaucrats are selected from among the population will influence their representativeness, their skills and capacities, their responsiveness to democratic controls, and their attitudes toward change in public policy and in managerial methods. These influences are especially consequent in the case of the choices of those who are to hold the higher posts in the bureaucracy, for these higher bureaucrats usually set the tone and tempo of the whole bureaucracy.

The choices involved in the question of how the bureaucrats are to be selected may be concretely illustrated by describing the choices made in the building of the United States Civil Services, with some contrasts offered by the British system. The first choice may be described as *open* versus *closed* recruitment. The American option is for open recruitment; that is, to recruit from among all the talents available in the national labour market.¹ The British option, by contrast, is to recruit directly from the schools and universities, at the school-leaving or graduating age. The

selection of those bureaucrats who are to hold the posts of higher responsibility in the bureaucracy presents an especially sharp contrast: in the American system these persons may be, and often are, recruited from outside the ranks of the bureaucracy at mid-career, or even later, stages. The American system has no counterpart of the British Administrative Class; the posts of the higher bureaucracy in the United States are filled by a wider system of recruitment that draws upon the talents available in the national pool of talent. These briefly described alternatives in deciding how the bureaucrats are to be chosen serve to illustrate that a deliberate and consequential choice can be made in determining the kind of bureaucracy a government wishes to have.

A second kind of choice can be made about the way in which bureaucrats are to be chosen. That choice is between the American preference for "programme staffing" and the British preference for "career staffing". The American practice is to recruit for particular programmes of the government, and secondarily for careers in the government generally. In the United States a new programme of the government usually means also a new agency and a new staff – a response often explained by asserting that "new ideas" require "new blood". The Tennessee Valley Authority may serve as an example. When the TVA was established in the 1930's it was not staffed from the ranks of the national civil service; instead, it was not staffed primarily by newly-recruited experts from the professions and other relevant occupations in the national labour market. Two tests were paramount in the selection process: that the person recruited should have the knowledge and skills needed by the TVA, and that he should have a positive commitment to the objectives of the TVA. Thus programme-commitment, not neutrality, was deliberately sought in the recruitment process. More recent examples – the Atomic Energy Commission, the foreign aid and information agencies, the space agency – serve to support the TVA pattern as a major tendency in the American preference for programme-staffing.

These two choices in recruitment patterns are closely related to a third choice: whether one of the criteria of selection shall emphasize general capacity or specialized capacity. The British pattern is to select the junior members of the administrative class

on the basis of their general knowledge and intelligence, demonstrated in examinations that test their mastery of a liberal-arts university education. These juniors are chosen at a young and plastic age; their training for advancement is provided by a variety of experiences within the bureaucracy, an experience pattern which continues to stress generalist capacities – a kind of amateur versatility within the frame of the bureaucratic tradition. The American pattern is a striking contrast. Although a growing number (but perhaps not an increasing proportion) of the bureaucrats are recruited by general examinations not very different from the British, the stronger preference is for specialized personnel often recruited after substantial experience has been acquired outside the bureaucracy. An example is provided by the recent history of the U.S. Foreign Service. In the 1920's the British model was in a general sense adopted as the recruitment method. World War II brought severe tests to this system, and it was in fact drastically modified by the creation of new agencies staffed by specialists. The Foreign Service Act of 1946 was an attempt to restore the generalist pattern of the inter-war years, but the restored system turned out to be not viable. By the mid-1950's it was necessary to reorganize the foreign service personnel system drastically. A massive transfusion of "new blood" was accomplished by transferring into the foreign service corps practically all the specialized and professional personnel of the State Department, so that the U.S. Foreign Service again reflects the deep-seated American preference for the highly-trained and experienced specialist rather than for the generalist.

Yet a fourth choice also confronts the framers of bureaucracies: Shall the interchange of personnel between governmental careers and non-governmental careers be minimized or maximized? The British choice is to minimize the cross-flow of careers between the public and private sectors of employment. The American choice is to maximize the interchange, especially among members of the professions and among business executives and specialists. There are few high-ranking bureaucrats in the U.S. Civil Service who have not in their lifetime been both a bureaucrat and a non-bureaucrat. Exposure to the tests of success in a professional career or in some other private endeavour is more often than not

one of the decisive standards in the recruitment of the higher civil service. These changes of personnel between public and private careers are not systematically organized, and are not always consciously sought by the personnel systems, but they are nonetheless one of the durable and prominent characteristics of the American bureaucracy.

These sets of choices, it will be apparent, are closely interrelated, in high degree interdependent. It will be apparent, too, that both Britain and the United States have made choices that give each of them a consistent series of choices; each of the two patterns is internally coherent. In a very real sense, also, the British set of choices arises out of the structure of British society, as does the American pattern out of its society. That is to say, each system of choices is indigenous. It is, therefore, doubtful that either is a neat package ready for export to other societies. The two systems of choices are accordingly less a problem in deciding which represents a preferable ideal than a demonstration that these persistent questions about the bureaucracy (who are to be the bureaucrats? How are the bureaucrats to be chosen?) must be answered for each country in the context of its own society. The British answers, it may be hazarded, produce a more orderly and symmetrical, a more prudent, a more articulate, a more cohesive and more powerful bureaucracy; the American choices, it may be further hazarded, produce a more internally competitive, a more experimental, a noisier and less coherent, a less powerful bureaucracy within its own governmental system, but a more dynamic one. The most perplexing question remains: for other countries, what is the relevance of these differences for their purposes?

III

What is the role of bureaucrats in governmental decision-making? We are all aware that the actual process of decision-making in governmental systems differs in some marked degree from the formal description of the decision-process. We have often observed, also, that the twentieth century has been especially hard on legislatures everywhere. Thus in Great Britain many commentators refer to Cabinet Government, as a way of noting

the decline of the House of Commons, while some go a step farther and speak of Prime Ministerial Government to emphasize an even greater distance between the House and the centre of decisions. Similarly in the United States observers often write to Presidential Supremacy to emphasize a trend away from Congress as a centre of power. In both countries these phrases are oversimplified descriptions of an important fact: there are trends and changes in the decision-making process in all governmental systems, and the reality of the process is not found merely in constitutional and other formal statements of the way in which power is distributed. The actual process is complex and subtle, and is not easily discovered or described.

In this actual and informal process of governing, it is worthwhile to ask: what is the role of the bureaucracy? The formal and official answer in most countries is that the bureaucracy is an agent of the decision-makers, but rather their instrument, not an autonomous brain in its own right but rather the neutral executor of plans made by others. This formal theory of the bureaucracy is of course a myth. It is a myth which serves several purposes, but it does not help in a realistic description of the decision-making process. The fact is that in all countries the bureaucracy is one of the important actors in the making of governmental decisions; in some systems the bureaucrats are the leading actors, and in most systems their power as decision-makers would seem to be increasing. Our concern, then, is not with the formal, and now transparent, myth, but with the question of the roles that bureaucrats do in fact have in the decision-making process.

In a decision system does the bureaucrat take the initiative in making policy proposals, or does he wait upon the proposals of others? The answer appears to be that bureaucrats are increasingly the source of initial policy proposals, but that in most systems care is taken to obscure and to make ambiguous their initiating role. That is, the formal theory is deferred to, and a ritual is observed which masks the fact that bureaucrats are actually the source of many initiatives. The British system especially serves to mute the role of the bureaucrat as initiator and framer of policy. The American system, by contrast pays less deference to formal bureaucratic theory; the higher civil servant is expected to initiate

policy proposals, to do so often in full view of the other decision-makers and the public, and to take the career risks associated with such activity. There seems little doubt that the British bureaucrat makes a higher proportion of initial policy proposals than does the American bureaucrat, while the differing style and etiquette of the two systems create the opposite impression. One pattern protects the elected official by inflating his initiating role; the other provides the elected official with competition. One system cloaks the bureaucrat with the safety of anonymity; the other exposes him to equal risks with other decision-makers. The consequences are thus more substantial than they first appear to be.

Beyond the stage of initiation, is the bureaucrat an adviser on, or a protagonist of, policy and programme? The British system emphasizes the advisory and analytical functions of the bureaucrats, but this public posture obscures the more active roles pursued by bureaucrats behind the screen of ministerial responsibility. The American system also demands the advisory and analytical roles for its bureaucrats, but it gives equal or greater emphasis to the bureaucrats as champion of his programme – before Congressional committees, interest groups, and not infrequently with the communication media. This more open and visible policy role for the American bureaucrat is not unchallenged by other actors in the decision-making process (for example, by Congressmen, political executives, interest group leaders, and the communication media), but the role is widely and skillfully managed by the bureaucrats. In a large degree this practice is related to the fact that a substantial proportion of American bureaucrats are more fully committed to policies and programmes than they are to uninterrupted careers in the bureaucracy; many of them move in and out of the public service several times in a life-time. The role of protagonist is a recognized and legitimate role for the American bureaucrat; risks attend it, but these are softened by the alternative careers open to the American civil servant and the genuine prospects of a return to the bureaucracy when the policy wheel has turned.

As one of the actors in the decision-making system is the bureaucrat cast as innovator and source of energy, or as guardian of continuity and stability? The British system emphasizes his role as prudent guardian; his take is to make the minister aware of risks

and difficulties, of errors in fact and reason, of unanticipated and undesirable probable consequences. His most proper role is seen as the firm but deferential vetoer of amateur though perhaps popular enthusiasms. The American system is not free of these tendencies (probably common to the permanent staffs of all large and complex organizations, whether in the public or private sector), but the dominant characteristics of the system encourage the American bureaucrat to be an innovator, a source of forward-moving energy. The controlling expectations of the system are that new ideas, energetically expressed, will emerge from the bureaucracy. The system awards the rank of hero to these innovators, not to the guardians of continuity and stability.

Those three aspects of the bureaucrat as policy-maker serve to underscore again the complexities and subtleties of the governing process, the gap between formal doctrine and structure and the realities of decision-making, as well as to emphasize the central role of the bureaucracy in governing. And this central role of the bureaucracy gives significance both to the question of how bureaucrats are to be chosen and to the question of the actual roles of the bureaucrats as initiators of proposals, protagonists of policy, and sources of innovation. These questions in turn lead to an even more crucial one: how are the bureaucrats to be governed?

IV

In any society that has as central institutions large scale, complex organizations for the conduct of governmental business, the bureaucracy has perforce greater power. The bureaucrats thus become not merely a problem in administration but also an important problem in governance. How are the boundaries of bureaucratic power to be set, and by whom? What restraining rules are to confine the power role of the bureaucracy? What arrangements in the decision-making apparatus serve to make the bureaucrats visible and responsible actors in the exercise of their power?

Some commentators on these questions answer that the main ingredient of bureaucratic responsibility to democratic norms is a code of behaviour for bureaucrats which emphasizes deference to elected officials and other aspects of the democratic system. This

“inner check”, a democratic self-restraint to be exercised by the bureaucrats themselves, is regarded by other observers as an insufficient guarantee against bureaucratic domination. These skeptical commentators offer alternative answers, the more important of which can be examined by continuing to compare the characteristics of the British and the American bureaucratic systems.

There is first the proposal that the bureaucracy be made representative in its composition. The British system has given small emphasis to this criterion, while the American system has made it a major characteristic. Both systems recruit an elite group in terms of intelligence and skill, although these two terms are given different definitions in the two societies, but the American system has also been concerned to recruit a bureaucracy that is essentially a mirror of the nation – in social and economic class characteristics, in geographic, educational, ethnic, religious, and racial characteristics. To a very large degree, the American system does succeed in its aim to build a bureaucracy which is “representative”, not an exotic elite. In fact, some students of the system declare that the American bureaucracy is more representative of American society than is the elected Congress. This is a large claim, and is perhaps not wholly relevant to the problem of a responsible bureaucracy, but it does reflect the degree of the American commitment to an open, mobile and representative bureaucracy, linked closely in its main characteristics to the American society itself.

There is also the proposal that the bureaucracy be made more responsible by making it more internally competitive, to make certain that bureaucrats compete openly with other bureaucrats for the exercise of power. The British system does not have this preference for a bureaucracy that is pluralistic and internally competitive in its structure and operations; instead, it values symmetry and a tightly meshed bureaucracy, especially in the monolithic characteristics of the administrative class at the top of the bureaucratic structure. The American system, by contrast, produces a bureaucracy that is so competitively pluralistic that contesting elements in the bureaucracy are compelled to seek allies outside the bureaucracy – in the Congress, in the interest groups, in the communication

media. The American system accordingly does not often pose bureaucratic power against non-bureaucratic power; most often the contest in decision-making power is between opposing alliances each of which contains bureaucratic and non-bureaucratic elements. The American bureaucracy is not, as a consequence, self-contained as a centre of power, nor can it be self-regarding in its goals or strategies; each significant segment of the bureaucracy must be more involved with forces in its non-bureaucratic context than with other bureaucrats. And, to add to the pluralism of the system, most bureaucratic-non-bureaucratic alliances are vulnerable and impermanent, so that there is a constant reshaping and realigning, emphasizing still further the internally competitive nature of the American bureaucracy. Thus, one kind of answer to the problem of bureaucratic power is the American design for producing an internally competitive bureaucracy, a system in which bureaucrats restrain the power of other bureaucrats and each major group of bureaucrats must share power with non-bureaucratic allies.

There is a third approach to the governance of bureaucrats: personal responsibility rather than anonymity for the bureaucrat. In this respect the British and American systems also present contrasts. The British system emphasizes anonymity; the minister not only is required to take full responsibility but the bureaucrat remains a faceless unknown. (The establishment of this convention represents one of the great strategic triumphs of the bureaucracy, since anonymity is a method of exercising power without being required to pay the costs of error). The American bureaucrat is not an anonymous, invisible actor in the decision-making process. He is, without any important limitation, held responsible for what he does. Presidents may on occasion try to shield him, or department heads may also; but in the end the Congressional committees, the interest groups, the communication media, or other actors, will usually bring home to the bureaucrat his personal responsibility for his own actions. This is not always accomplished with a fine sense of abstract justice – whether the bureaucrat is being praised or blamed – for this is competitive world of power in which no actor is regarded as either privileged or fragile. The American civil servant who earns high and lasting prestige in his society is usually one who most completely breaks the mask of anonymity and becomes a

public figure. There are, of course, situations in which American bureaucrats would prefer the cloak of anonymity, and the convention is sometimes invoked by them or by allies on their behalf; there are also American observers who urge the adoption of the British model. But the system of personal responsibility prevails against these reservations, and appears likely to continue to do so. The visibility and personal responsibility of the bureaucrat is a characteristic built strongly into the American governmental system.

There is, finally, another aspect to the governance of bureaucracies: publicity *versus* secrecy. Here also the British and the American models stand in sharp contrast. In the United States there is a widely accepted code that the public is entitled to know everything about what the government is doing, even what the government is planning to do. The strongest exponents of this doctrine are the communication media, especially the newspapers, which have increasingly used their motto "the Right to Know" as if it were a part of the Bill of Rights. But every cross-section of American society tends to believe that there ought to be non-governmental secrets except those which clearly affect national defence or the rights of individual persons to privacy. This general belief is encouraged and made effective by central features of the governmental system: the inquiry powers of the Congressional committees which open up executive branch secrets, the internally competitive bureaucracy which shares its secrets with its outside allies, and the zeal of the communication media in its daily probing to reduce the boundaries of secrecy. The bureaucracy is directly affected by this system of publicity because it is the custodian of most governmental secrets. In the American setting the bureaucrat's inherent preference for secrecy is sharply limited by the assumption of all the other actors that secrecy most often serves the convenience of those who hold the secrets, and that a strong case must be made against publication, the presumptions of the system being that publication is the norm. And, further, the operation of the actual decision-system compels the bureaucrats to share their secrets with non-bureaucratic allies; secrets thus shared are not secrets very long. The functioning of this system, with its strong preference for publicity over secrecy, is not devoid of difficulties. It is accompanied by complaints and counter-complaints,

by rough exchanges between the contestants and by rough justice rather than mercy toward some participants, but the system does curtail the bureaucratic uses of secrecy and does make the American governing process one of the most highly visible in the world.

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These brief and somewhat oversimplified observations on the contrasts between two important bureaucratic systems are intended mainly to suggest a few general hypotheses about bureaucracies. One of them is that in the building of bureaucratic systems there are many options, each choice having different consequences for the whole system; that is, these options are not merely technical issues in personnel management but more importantly choices affecting the nature of the governing process. Another implication is that the contrasting choices made in constructing these two bureaucratic systems were in the main determined by the matrix of the society in which they are each made; in other words, the nature of a particular bureaucracy is linked to the system of government and the society in which it operates. The options are thus limited by the social and political context of the particular bureaucracy, but this is not to suggest a rigid limitation—for example, the context of a parliamentary system does not dictate a particular set of choices. Instead, what is suggested is that the whole indigenous context—social and political and governmental—is the limiting factor. Bureaucratic models are not packages ready for export or import; they provide illustrations of options and styles for consideration in their separate parts, and for adaptation before acceptance in a different context.

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LEGISLATURES IN NEW STATES

W.H. MORRIS-JONES

I am delighted this afternoon to be back again, after an interval of several years, in this renowned Indian Institute of Public Administration and I feel highly honoured to be invited by the Director to speak to you.

At first sight, it may seem that my subject is rather far from your main areas of interest. The field is known as Comparative Legislative Studies and within that field I have, in recent years, been studying this one organ of the body politic, the legislature, in a number of 'new states'—but *not* including India. So I am not directly concerned this afternoon either with administration or with India. Nevertheless, I hope and expect before I finish to persuade you that my subject-matter is of interest and relevance to Indian students of administration. After all, the work of public administrators is often greatly affected by the activities of legislatures and their legislators. And while India is in many ways different from the general run of 'new states', I believe that if you listen carefully you will hear, in my accounts of the five countries I have been examining, some points which you will recognize as having a bearing on India.

So far I have used the term 'legislature', but now I am going to drop it. For several reasons, 'parliament' is a better term. For one thing, 'legislature' is mainly used by Americans; the term stresses the law-making role which is characteristic of the US Congress—

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