

**THE  
FRENCH CIVIL SERVICE:  
BUREAUCRACY IN TRANSITION**

**BY**

**WALTER RICE SHARP**

*Docteur en Droit*

**New York**

**THE MACMILLAN COMPANY**

**1931**

COPYRIGHT, 1931,  
By THE MACMILLAN COMPANY.

---

All rights reserved—no part of this book may be reproduced  
in any form without permission in writing  
from the publisher.

---

Set up and printed.  
Published July, 1931.

SET UP BY J. J. LITTLE & IVES COMPANY  
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**THE FRENCH CIVIL SERVICE:  
BUREAUCRACY IN TRANSITION**



THE MACMILLAN COMPANY  
NEW YORK • BOSTON • CHICAGO • DALLAS  
ATLANTA • SAN FRANCISCO

MACMILLAN & CO., LIMITED  
LONDON • BOMBAY • CALCUTTA  
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY  
OF CANADA, LIMITED  
TORONTO

## PREFACE

To the effective development of a genuine science of *comparative* public administration objective analyses of the behavior of national administrative systems differing sharply in structure and background are an indispensable prerequisite. The present study is intended as a segmentary contribution to a series of such analyses. While the study is focused principally upon the problem of personnel management in the French public service, I have approached the task with the conviction that the legal and technical phases of the problem, particularly in an old, traditionalistic bureaucracy such as governs the French Republic, can be understood only in the light of their larger sociological and psychological setting. Public administration everywhere is administered by *human* administrators for *human* citizens and taxpayers. This fact is lost sight of in some of the otherwise excellent treatises on administration which are apparently predicated on the classic half-truth that constitutional democracies are "governments of laws, not men."

In attempting, therefore, to unravel the baffling intricacies of French public personnel practices, I have deliberately devoted as much space to questions of personality and temperament, to the ramifications of bloc politics and syndicalism in the civil service, to the influence of *camaraderie à la française*, and to the socio-economic foundations of government employment, as to the more formal aspects of recruitment, training, classification, compensation, promotion, transfer, tenure, and discipline. As the dominant behavior pattern in all French group life, bureaucracy but reflects in government, in bolder relief perhaps, tendencies, admirable and otherwise, which

permeate education, commerce, industry, labor organization, the church, and in some degree, even the private professions. In each of these domains, more or less, the functional status of personnel is hierarchically regulated.

Nowadays—at any rate since the upheaval of 1914-1919—bureaucracy in France, governmental as well as unofficial, is obviously in transition: a transition from the nineteenth century *milieu* of individualized production by artisans, craftsmen, clerks, and small-scale managerial officials guided by rule-of-thumb methods, to a more “rationalized,” specialized twentieth-century technique of management. As yet, it goes without saying, this change has been felt chiefly in the realm of large-scale private industry; but its effects, spasmodically at least, are beginning to have their impact upon governmental processes. Whether France will travel as far along the road of industrialization as its Teutonic and Anglo-Saxon neighbors is doubtful, but the controversy now going on between the exponents of the older ways and the advocates of the newer order of things is having its repercussions in the operation of the public services, especially those handling economic and social functions. In short, this is my justification for the subtitle given to the present volume.

The materials upon which the book is based are diverse in character. In addition to an extensive examination of available printed books, brochures, articles, newspapers, scientific journals, and syndicalist periodicals, I have drawn heavily upon published government documents, especially upon departmental yearbooks and reports. My personal observations *sur place* began ten years ago when, as an American Field Service Fellow (1920-22), I studied at the Universities of Strasbourg, Paris, and Bordeaux. More intensively and systematically, by questionnaire and personal interview, I was able to obtain from government personnel bureaus and other sources a great deal of special information during a sojourn of several months in France in 1927 as a Fellow of the Social Science Research Council of New York. Over a hundred civil

servants of all grades, judges, journalists, professors, and labor leaders were then kind enough to give me generously of their time and attention, as I plied them with queries, many of which must have seemed somewhat puzzling, if not naïve.

Unfortunately, with a view to statistical analysis, many of the official data, published as well as unpublished, which I was successful in tracking down, proved disappointing. Working in France, the social investigator soon discovers that officialdom has not as yet been greatly impressed by the value of keeping accurate, comparable statistics on personnel practices, let alone publishing them promptly in usable, systematic form. Not only are there serious gaps in the quantitative information which is available on the civil service, but one finds in many government offices a disconcerting reluctance to divulge facts which the files doubtless contain. This attitude of secrecy is apparently a vestige of the aristocratic inheritance from monarchical and imperial régimes, when official posts were in the main the private patrimonies of the occupants.

What is more, budgetary retrenchments since the World War have led not only to excessive delay in the appearance of departmental reports, yearbooks, and the like, but even to the suspension of the publication of many documents which, prior to 1914, used to appear regularly. This backward state of French public reporting is in large measure responsible for forcing me to forego certain statistical comparisons and analyses which I had originally contemplated undertaking.

The fact that some of the figures and portions of the quantitative data date from 1927-28, and that later figures have been unavailable, does not invalidate the conclusions reached by the study. By recourse to subsequently published official documents and correspondence on certain peculiarly knotty questions, I have endeavored to keep abreast of the more important changes which have taken place since 1928. Administrative processes in a country like France are not appreciably altered in a year or two. For purposes of scientific evaluation,

*le monde fonctionnairiste français* of 1931 remains essentially what it was three years ago, with the single exception that the crisis precipitated by the acute maladjustment of salaries and cost of living, which was then still at its height, has by now partially subsided.

Space prevents the enumeration individually of all those, in France, England, or America, in official position or otherwise, to whom I am in heavy debt for *entrée* to materials, special information, insights, counsel, or suggestion. It would be invidious to mention certain names while omitting others. In many instances I have made special acknowledgment by footnote. To all others who have aided me in any way I desire here to express my grateful appreciation. To the Social Science Research Council I owe a double debt of gratitude: first, for the opportunity to carry on investigations in France as a Research Fellow of the Council, and secondly, for time made free from official duties as a member of the Council's staff (since 1929) so that I might complete the preparation of the manuscript of this study.

No one more than the author realizes its shortcomings, for which he alone assumes full responsibility.. What I have been impelled to say in criticism of French administrative mores has been said, I trust, in a spirit of sympathetic understanding. Valid criticism of much of our American administrative behavior would similarly be in order from a French investigator.

WALTER R. SHARP

NEW YORK CITY,  
June, 1931.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE SETTING OF THE PROBLEM . . . . .	1
A. The Imperial Heritage . . . . .	3
B. The Impact of <i>Étatisme</i> . . . . .	7
C. Quantitative Growth of the Civil Service . . . . .	13
D. The Expansion of the State's Payroll . . . . .	21
E. Current Orientation of the Problem . . . . .	24
II. CENTRALIZATION MINUS INTEGRATION . . . . .	27
A. The Régime of "Decrees" . . . . .	27
B. An Un-coördinated Administrative Structure . . . . .	32
C. The Internal Departmental Hierarchy . . . . .	38
D. The Personnel Agency . . . . .	42
III. TOWARD A GENERAL CIVIL SERVICE CODE . . . . .	50
A. Syndicalism versus Authoritarianism . . . . .	50
B. Personnel Regulation by Special Statutes . . . . .	57
C. The Piece-meal Development of a General Code by Decree . . . . .	61
D. The Rôle of the Council of State in Evolving a Legal Sanction . . . . .	68
IV. THE BACKGROUND OF RECRUITMENT . . . . .	75
A. The Passing of Patronage . . . . .	75
B. The Changing Area of Selection . . . . .	84
C. Undermining the Sex Barrier . . . . .	91
D. Preference to War Veterans and Their Widows . . . . .	97
E. Educational Preparation . . . . .	101
F. Correlation of Educational System and State Recruitment . . . . .	115

CHAPTER	PAGE
V. THE PROCEDURE OF EXAMINATION AND APPOINTMENT . . . . .	121
A. Date and Place of the <i>Concours</i> . . . . .	123
B. The Examining Board . . . . .	127
C. Fixing the List of Eligible Applicants . . . . .	130
D. The Examination Setting . . . . .	131
E. Fixing the List of Applicants Admissible to Final Tests . . . . .	132
F. The Final Rating of Testees . . . . .	133
G. Preparation of the Employment List . . . . .	137
H. Appointment and Assignment . . . . .	138
VI. INITIAL SELECTION OF PERSONNEL . . . . .	140
A. Responsible Administrative-Executive Positions . . . . .	143
B. Minor Executive-Clerical Positions . . . . .	154
C. Manipulative-Mechanical-Custodial Workers . . . . .	160
VII. THE RECRUITMENT OF EXPERTISE: PROFESSIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC . . . . .	171
A. Public School Teachers and University Staffs . . . . .	172
B. The Judiciary . . . . .	180
C. Engineers and Technicians . . . . .	186
D. Other Technical and Scientific Specialists . . . . .	190
VIII. CLASSIFICATION AND COMPENSATION . . . . .	195
A. Pre-War Anomalies and Inequalities . . . . .	195
B. Recent Efforts to Secure Salary Standardization . . . . .	200
C. Supplementary Allowances and Perquisites . . . . .	208
D. Hours, Leaves of Absence, and Working Conditions . . . . .	214
E. Disability and Retirement Pensions . . . . .	217
F. The French State as Paymaster . . . . .	227
G. Conclusions . . . . .	238
IX. THE MOVEMENT OF PERSONNEL: PROMOTION, TRANSFER, TURNOVER . . . . .	243
A. Background of the French Approach to the Problem . . . . .	246
B. The Mechanism of Promotion Procedure . . . . .	250

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

xi

CHAPTER	PAGE
C. The Evaluation of Criteria for Promotion . . .	253
D. Continuation Training for Administrative Staffs	259
E. Assignment and Transfer . . . . .	265
F. Tenure and Turnover . . . . .	272
X. EMPLOYEE BEHAVIOR AND ITS SANCTIONS .	283
A. Evolution of a Code of Disciplinary Procedure .	284
B. How the Code Operates . . . . .	292
C. Civic Rights and Political Activity . . . .	295
D. The Strike as a Weapon of Staff Defense . .	312
XI. DEPARTMENTAL STUDIES OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT . . . . .	322
A. Ministry of Foreign Affairs . . . . .	323
B. Ministry of Public Works . . . . .	335
C. Ministry of Justice . . . . .	340
XII. DEPARTMENTAL STUDIES OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT ( <i>Continued</i> ) . . . . .	355
D. Ministry of Finance . . . . .	355
E. The P. T. T. . . . .	373
F. Ministry of Public Instruction . . . . .	392
XIII. A MUNICIPAL CIVIL SERVICE: BORDEAUX .	416
A. The Municipal Organization . . . . .	417
B. The Personnel System . . . . .	419
C. Morale and Efficiency . . . . .	427
XIV. OFFICIAL BUREAUCRACY AND THE PUBLIC .	431
A. The Temper of the French Bureaucrat . . .	432
B. Procedural Vices: <i>La Paperasserie</i> . . . .	446
C. The Public's Reaction to Bureaucratic Pathology	453
XV. THE POTENTIALITIES OF ADMINISTRATIVE SYNDICALISM . . . . .	460
A. The Struggle for the Right of Association . .	462
B. The Federal Structure of Staff Syndicalism . .	476
C. Organizational Processes and Leadership . . .	484

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
D. Syndicalism as an Ameliorator of Employment Conditions . . . . .	491
E. The Promotion of Administrative Reform . . .	494
F. Employee Syndicalism as a Socio-Political Force	500
G. Menace or Promise? . . . . .	503
 XVI. THE RENOVATION OF BUREAUCRACY . . .	 509
A. Personnel Management Vitalized by Imagination	510
B. Stability and Integration in the Administration of Policy . . . . .	530
C. Control by Advisory Functionalism . . . . .	541
 APPENDICES . . . . .	 563
 INDEX . . . . .	 575

# THE FRENCH CIVIL SERVICE: BUREAUCRACY IN TRANSITION

## CHAPTER I

### THE SETTING OF THE PROBLEM

"The functionary is the curse of France, but who will be bold enough to apply the guillotine?"

—SISLEY HUDDLESTON, *France*, p. 587.

Nowadays it is commonplace to regard administration as the essential stuff of which the fabric of the modern State is woven. Yet, as Graham Wallas has reminded us, democracy does not interest itself so much in the processes of administration as in the broad results of governmental action. This attitude constitutes a very real difficulty when the specialist inside or outside public office seriously attempts to improve the technique of political administration. All pioneers in the effort somehow to evolve a "science" of public affairs have run into this indifference of the citizenry not only to the "anatomy," but to the "physiology" of public administrative systems. If popular inertia and apathy all too often block the path of students of public administration in a relatively new country like America, the situation is doubly exasperating in an old, traditionalist nation like France. A study of administrative practices in such a country becomes all the more instructive and fascinating: instructive because of the generations of experience that lie behind what one discovers, fascinating because the exploration of what is there is baffling in its complexity.

We are to embark upon an analysis of the civil service of the French Republic. If the importance of our study be granted, the method we shall follow requires some explana-

tion. It will be necessary, at the outset, for us to know the sociological setting of a political bureaucracy that has survived a half dozen revolutions and *coups d'état* during the the past hundred and fifty years. We shall need to outline clearly the organization by and through which this bureaucracy now operates. Its size and scope of activity must be assessed. Its hierarchically centralized structure must be revealed. Only after this foreground is delineated will we be ready to attempt an appraisal of the technical phases of public personnel administration as the French understand it. This appraisal properly begins with a consideration of the legal rules and regulations that govern the French administrative system. It should next proceed to a study of the personnel agency itself, which, in France, unlike that to which we are accustomed in America, is organized on a de-centralized basis. This done, our attention will be directed successively to a horizontal survey of methods of training, recruitment, classification, compensation, promotion, tenure, turnover, discipline, and civic status of the various categories of public employees. To illustrate the application of the foregoing methods and procedures, we shall examine intensively personnel practices as they have been evolved in specific administrative jurisdictions. Selected for their importance, as well as for their variation in size and function, the latter will include (1) the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, (2) the Ministry of Public Works, (3) the Judiciary, (4) the Ministry of Finance, (5) the Postal, Telegraph, and Telephone Services, (6) the Ministry of Public Instruction, and (7) the municipality of Bordeaux. The policies of certain other miscellaneous units will from time to time be referred to in order to clarify points of procedure peculiar to them.

Following this "anatomical" analysis, we shall endeavor to make an evaluation of French personnel administration in general by exploring how it has been influenced by the syndicalist movement, the volatile pattern of French parliamentarism, and the vices and temper of traditionalistic bureaucracy.

.

Our final and most strategic inquiry will concern itself with the possibilities of renovating the French administrative armature. How, in the light of French temperament and national traditions, can routineerism somehow be made to give way to initiative and creativeness? How, if at all, can a larger measure of efficiency be introduced? In short, are there signs in France of modernizing administration in the light of the implications of scientific personnel management? Out of this interesting exploration we shall hope will emerge certain lessons for other countries with analogous problems. Perhaps these lessons may furnish clues to the path we must take in building, albeit slowly and fitfully, a genuine "science"—or perhaps "art"?—of comparative public administration.

#### A. THE IMPERIAL HERITAGE

Like individuals, institutions find it difficult to escape the imprint of heredity. Republican France has inherited for administrative purposes what M. Herriot once aptly characterized as "an imperial mosaic." Despite the impact of democracy upon the formation of public policy, the system by which it is administered still remains essentially Napoleonic in structure; and Napoleon did but build upon the foundations of the *ancien régime* in which, as Mr. Laski has suggested, the government seemed to possess "many of the characteristics of the king's household."<sup>1</sup> The First Emperor erected upon these ancient foundations the kind of hierarchical system which would consolidate his control. Taine, better than anyone else, gives us the classic description of the Napoleonic system of administration:

"It forms one unique, vast, monumental block, in which all branches of the service are lodged under one roof; in addition to the national and general services belonging to the public power, we find others also, local and special, which do not belong to it, such as worship, education, charity, fine arts,

<sup>1</sup> *Authority in the Modern State* (New Haven, 1919), p. 323.

literature, departmental and communal interests, each installed in a distinct compartment. All the compartments are ordered and arranged alike, forming a circle around the magnificent central apartment, with which each is in communication by a bell; as soon as the bell rings and the sound spreads from division to sub-division, the entire service, from the chief clerk down to the lowest employee, is instantly in motion; in this respect, the arrangement as regards despatch, co-ordination, exactitude, and working facilities, is admirable."<sup>2</sup>

Here is picturesquely revealed that strong Latin fondness for symmetry and order which goes far to explain why attempts to decentralize political power have made comparatively so little headway since Napoleon's day. Under the Restoration as under the First Empire, it was always the central government that appointed and directed "all the representatives of local society in the department, in the commune, and in the intermediate circumscriptions, the prefect, sub-prefects, mayors and assistants, the councillors of the *département*, of the *arrondissement*, and the commune."<sup>3</sup> Local communal life remained "under the second régime what it was under the first one, an extension of the central society, an appendix of the State, an adjunct of the great establishment of which the seat is Paris."

In such a scheme, says Taine again, "we behold the innumerable body of clerks, functionaries, supernumeraries, and postulants, a whole multitude, ranged tier beyond tier and attentive; nobody advances except upon order and in his turn. Nowhere in Europe are human lives so well regulated, within lines of demarcation so universal, so simple, and so satisfactory to the eye and to logic: the edifice in which Frenchmen are henceforth to move and act is regular from top to bottom in its entirety as well as in its details, outside as well as inside; its stories, one above the other, are adjusted with exact sym-

<sup>2</sup> H. A. Taine, *The Modern Régime* (Eng. trans. by John Durand, 2 vols. New York, 1890), Vol. I, p. 140.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 314-315.



metry; its juxtaposed masses form pendants and counterpoise; all the lines and forms, every dimension and proportion, all its props and buttresses combine, through their mutual dependencies, to form a harmony and to maintain an equilibrium.”<sup>4</sup> Through the Restoration to the July Monarchy and the Second Republic this system remained fundamentally unchanged. The Third Napoleon governed with the heritage left him by his uncle. Nor did he in any appreciable fashion modify its hierarchical uniformity. To be sure, from the fall of Napoleon I to the passing of Napoleon III, French liberals and republicans were all adversaries of centralization; but they made little dent in the old imperialistic machine. “Dynasties, flags, and régimes passed away: the Bureaucracy neither died nor surrendered.”<sup>5</sup> The prefects of the first years of the Third Republic were, in fact, “the lineal descendants of the prefects of Napoleon.”

While territorial decentralization has made some progress since 1870, the France of to-day still uses the same administrative areas that the Revolution and Napoleon gave her. They are, moreover, fitted into substantially the same hierarchical pyramid. True it is that the *départements* have since 1871 enjoyed limited autonomy, and the communes likewise since 1884; but *la tutelle administrative* seemed at the beginning of the present century almost as strong as it was a century earlier.<sup>6</sup> M. Chardon could write as late as 1904: “We put R. F. [*République française*] on all official reports, but these reports are made for the emperor.”<sup>7</sup> Of the ensemble of administrative officials throughout France, only the mayors and the employees of municipal councils were chosen other than by the central government or its local representatives.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Vol. I, p. 141.

<sup>5</sup> A. Guerard, *Beyond Hatred* (New York, 1925), p. 26.

<sup>6</sup> *La tutelle administrative* is the classic French phrase to denote central supervision over local administrative authorities.

<sup>7</sup> H. Chardon, *Les Travaux Publics* (Paris, 1904), p. 357.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. J. W. Garner, “Administrative Reform in France,” *Amer. Pol. Sci. Rev.*, February, 1919, for a good discussion of the whole problem of decentralization as it appeared just after the war.