

# Public Personnel Administration

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*Dedicated to*

CHARLES AUSTIN BEARD

To whose insight, vision, and leadership those interested in the art and science  
of public administration are permanently indebted.

## FOREWORD

THIS work was originally conceived and outlined in 1921 with the advice of Charles A. Beard, at the time Director of the New York Bureau of Municipal Research. Not a little of the content is derived from surveys made by the senior author while a member of the Bureau staff. The basic philosophy of personnel administration as an integral part of administration as well as of the factors entering into it, are to be credited to Henry C. Metcalf and Ordway Tead, authors of *Personnel Management*.

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WILLIAM E. MOSHER  
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## INTRODUCTION

THE most characteristic development of modern times is the gradual and persistent emergence of the socialized State. Industry and trade which have so long and so successfully insisted on a kind of God-given right to be free of governmental interference, have in the space of a few years been increasingly subjected to controls, both direct and indirect, enforced by the superior power of the State. Because of its democratic character, the latter has necessarily made the well-being of its citizens paramount to other influences and considerations.

Such movements are by no means limited to the era of the New Deal. The "march of events" has brought in its trail, on the one hand, an extension of the regulation of business in one form or another, and on the other an increasing body of so-called social legislation. The uninterrupted expansion in governmental activities along these and related lines may be measured by the increase in the force of federal employees from 1924 on, as set forth in the following table:<sup>1</sup>

SUMMARY OF EMPLOYMENT IN THE EXECUTIVE CIVIL BRANCH  
OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT<sup>a</sup>

1924	521,641
1928	540,867
1932	583,196
1934	673,095
1935	719,440
1935 (Dec.)	815,789

<sup>a</sup> Does not include the legislative, judicial, and military (uniformed) branches of the federal government, or the employees of the District of Columbia. The executive civil branch includes both permanent and temporary positions, but not the Civilian Conservation Corps.

If national figures were available on local and state personnel, it would be found that comparable upward swings were registered during this same period in the employment curves of these jurisdictions as well. It is not within the scope of this study to marshal the arguments pro and con the extensions of public activity. For our purposes it will suffice to point to the undeniable fact of such extensions and the significance which public employment assumes under such circumstances.

<sup>1</sup> *52nd Annual Report*, U. S. Civil Service Commission (1935), p. 7.

It is unfortunate that employment under the government has been so largely lacking in prestige in this country that the abler young people have given but little thought to the possibility of a career in the public service. In general they have been accustomed to look upon public service as a kind of second- or third-rate calling. Such an attitude is of a piece with the tradition in this country that politics and government are but incidental side-issues in the main business of life, despite the fact that the trends of the past two decades prove the opposite.

That young people of first-class training and promise are turning to government for employment during the depression period does not signify an increase in prestige of the public service so much as a dearth of openings in other directions. In view of the wide range and far-reaching significance of governmental activities, with the prospects for further expansion in the offing, there are few more pressing problems than to see to it that the government shall be able continuously to compete with private enterprises for its quota of the ablest minds and the most highly trained intelligence available, even after the passing of the depression. To accomplish this will require a thoroughgoing rehabilitation of the bureaucracy, the agency through which the government works its will.<sup>2</sup> Such rehabilitation will involve the development of a positive personnel policy, a closer integration with the school system, the colleges and universities, and a systematic education of the general public as to the importance and advantages of careers in the public service.

The attainment of these objectives calls for a complete break with present conditions. In only a limited number of cases has any governmental unit a personnel policy worthy of the name. Apart from those jurisdictions having civil service commissions, personnel is not generally recognized as a proper staff function. As a consequence there are likely to be about as many personnel policies as there are department heads—if the heterogeneous practices and traditions may be dignified by the term, policy. Even under the standard civil service law the commission is likely to be responsible only for a limited number of those functions properly assigned to a central personnel agency. Others are either entirely neglected or handled according to the predilections or prejudices of administrative heads.

Furthermore, there is the omnipresent and at times omnipotent influence of political and personal favoritism which inevitably bedevils any personnel policy, however well conceived. Generally, the legislative branch and the

<sup>2</sup>Despite the popular distaste for the term "bureaucracy," and the well-known frailties of individual bureaucrats, the administrative officials and their aides are the indispensable working arm of the representatives of the people—the legislature. It is obvious that the progress of socialization depends to a large extent upon the development of a well-organized bureaucracy. See Friedrich, Carl J., and Colc, Taylor, *Responsible Bureaucracy, A Study of the Swiss Civil Service* (Cambridge, 1932), p. 27.

responsible party heads do not hesitate to exercise this influence when it serves their ends, being entirely unmindful of their responsibility for a high level of competence, for equitable salary scales, an up-to-date pension policy, suitable working conditions, and other basic features of employment. Finally, and to a large extent as a direct consequence of the above conditions, there is the low standing of the public service in the eyes of the public. So long as this continues, it serves as an effective check on the entrance of the more capable and promising young persons into public employment as a worth-while life career.

Thoroughgoing reform of personnel administration is long overdue. In view of the recent extension of governmental activities on every level from the local to the federal units, such a reform is required today as never before. Efficiency, economy, justice, self-interest, all point to the necessity of working out and adopting a positive personnel policy. It is the purpose of this work to describe such a policy. In this effort we shall, first, review past methods and critically examine those now in use by various government employers; second, call attention to those constructive policies that have been initiated or adopted by public authorities both here and abroad; and, finally, expand upon such others as are accepted as standard by the leading personnel managers in private enterprise, with special reference to their applicability to the conditions of public employment.

There is no greater danger to any state, or part of a state, than that it should rest contented with things as they are. Healthy discontent is a presage of growth.

OLIVER SHELDON,  
*The Philosophy of Management*  
(London, 1930), p. 89



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PART I

DEVELOPMENT AND SIGNIFICANCE  
OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE

*In the modern state the real government effectuates itself neither in parliamentary debates nor in royal proclamations, but in the exercise of administration in daily life, necessarily and unavoidably in the hands of the civil service.*

—Max Weber, quoted in Finer, Herman,  
*The Theory and Practice of Modern  
Government* (London, 1932). Vol. II,  
p. 1164.



## CHAPTER I

### THE EVOLUTION OF MODERN BUREAUCRACY

Democracy, if it knows its business, has no reason to fear bureaucracy.

—SIR WILLIAM BEVERIDGE<sup>1</sup>

The most democratic mass organization, if it has to solve modern social problems, cannot manage without a bureaucracy.

—KARL KAUTSKY<sup>2</sup>

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THE modern State is differentiated from its predecessors, in part at least, by the extensive development of its administrative personnel—the bureaucracy.<sup>3</sup> Even in the United States, where the science of administration has been slow to develop, a well-defined movement in the direction of integration has recently gotten under way,<sup>4</sup> while the trend to centralization has, over a period of years, greatly enhanced the power and thus the significance of the administrative hierarchy.<sup>5</sup> In the minds of a majority of contemporary scholars, the dangers of an uncoordinated administrative system loom larger than the possible abuses which may arise from bureaucracy. In a real sense, today, “though Parliament, the Cabinet, and the Presidents

<sup>1</sup> *The Public Service in War and Peace* (London, 1920), p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> *The Labor Revolution* (London, 1925), p. 156.

<sup>3</sup> As we are using the term, “bureaucracy” refers to a hierarchically organized administrative system in which determinate powers are exercised by officials possessing well-defined relationships one to another. Out of the long struggle between king and parliament for control of the bureaucracy, there has arisen a somewhat different popular conception. It is this more popular concept which Harold J. Laski has in mind when he writes: “Bureaucracy is the term usually applied to a system of government the control of which is so completely in the hands of officials that their power jeopardizes the liberty of ordinary citizens.” 3 *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (New York, 1930), p. 70. As used in this chapter, it is the former rather than the latter definition which the authors have in mind.

<sup>4</sup> See Chap. II, below.

<sup>5</sup> Because of differing meanings, it is essential to define at the outset the sense in which the terms “integration” and “centralization” are employed. Whenever they appear in this work, their meaning is that given to them by Leonard D. White in his *Introduction to the Study of Public Administration* (New York, 1926). The term “integration” is used to refer to the establishment of an hierarchical system of superior-subordinate relationships on the same level of government—i.e., national or state or local. On the other hand, “centralization” is used to characterize superior-subordinate relationships existing on different governmental levels. “In both cases the relationship of superior-subordinate is established, but in one case the subordinate originates in, and is also responsible to, a political unit different from that of his superior.” (*Ibid.*, p. 59.) The effect of integration is to perfect the hierarchy on a single government level; that of centralization, to weld into one hierarchical system the administrative organizations of different governmental levels.

may reign, the Civil Service governs."<sup>6</sup> Parliaments and Cabinets may determine general policies, although even on these prerogatives they are giving ground. But the civil service is concerned in the direct execution of government and has contacts with the public at every turn. By the character of the service, more than by any other single thing, modern government succeeds or fails.

A bureaucracy, like any institution, is composed of men. As such it is both static and dynamic: static in that officials are creatures of habit and tend to hold to established methods and procedures; dynamic, in that it reflects the changing trends of the times in which government is assigned a more and more dominant rôle. As the complexity of civilization has increased, the changes have been mirrored in the public service, just as every swing of the pendulum in the direction of popular government has had its repercussions there. It is our purpose in this chapter to enumerate some of the forces which have shaped the modern bureaucracies, and to examine briefly into some of their characteristics.

The public service is an ancient institution. Long before that period of world history when all roads led to Rome, well organized groups of public officials were making possible the cultural developments of Egypt and the Orient. But in the Western World it was the Roman Empire which first fully exploited the possibilities inherent in an hierarchical administrative system. Other parts of the ancient world neglected administration. In Athens, democratic traditions served to emphasize the orator-statesman, rather than the administrator; and in spite of the unexcelled development of political speculation, little attention was given to administrative problems. This was in part due to the small size of the Greek city-state and to the relative simplicity of governmental activities, as well as to the dogma that every citizen was equally the servant of the State.<sup>7</sup> But in the Roman Empire the complexity of administration forced both thought and energy into different channels. All modern bureaucracies owe a debt to her remarkable administrative organization.

But the Roman interlude passed and the order that had characterized the Empire was transformed into the chaos of feudalism. Relationships which had been public and legal gradually became personal, being grounded upon a system of private land tenure.<sup>8</sup> In general, the State was destroyed by

<sup>6</sup> Finer, *op. cit.*, p. 1170. For an excellent discussion of this point, see the article by Sir Francis L. C. Floud, "The Sphere of the Specialist in Public Administration," *Journal of Public Administration* (1923), pp. 122 f.

<sup>7</sup> On this point it is interesting to note a contemporary movement in the general direction of Greek thought. In a completely socialized state, the body of civil servants would be practically identical with the body of citizens. It is unquestionably the march of socialization which is injecting new life into the anti-liberal doctrine that the individual exists for society. In this connection, the similarities between the theories of communism and fascism are striking.

<sup>8</sup> It has been suggested that the emergence of feudalism out of the ruins of the Roman

feudalism and for a time a public service, in any strict sense of the word, ceased to exist in the west. If any institution fell heir to the Roman administrative tradition, it was not the feudal principality, but the medieval Church. During the Middle Ages it was there that the most completely organized bureaucracy was to be found. Gradually, however, the feudal world coalesced, until here and there a principality developed sufficient strength to enter the lists against the Church. Thus, in the course of the struggles over investiture, certain temporal powers again undertook the building of a distinctly public service. Well-constituted bodies of public officials existed at an early date in some of the city states of the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Germany, while in the Italian peninsula the affairs of state came to provide scope for the abilities of a Machiavelli.

The evolution of a quasi-professional public service in western Europe was closely geared to the growth of large armies,<sup>9</sup> and the compulsory military service which characterized the rising national states, added momentum to the movement. The military needs of the new states in many ways affected the development of a royal public service. The widespread practice of hiring substitutes to serve in the armies stimulated the professionalization of the military forces. Moreover, the very existence of large armies made inevitable the creation of an extensive royal service devoted to the collection of revenue for their maintenance. Finally, closely allied to the military ends of the State and subservient to them, were its commercial ends—the fostering and strict supervision of industry and trade, a movement which finally culminated in the great state systems of Mercantilism, Colbertism and Cameralism. The extension of the public service and the rapid evolution of bureaucracy were inextricably interwoven with these developments. As the State extended its sphere of functioning, a corresponding enlargement of the public service occurred.

In the modern sense, the civil service dates from the rise of the great national monarchies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>10</sup> As a

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Empire was aided, at the very least, by an ever-present tendency for public servants to "privatize" their offices; to look upon office as a sinecure and its emoluments as personal property. See Friedrich and Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 26. Certainly, such a phenomenon has been observable at various times, and its effect is to be seen today in some parts of the world, particularly in Manchuria, Mongolia, and parts of China.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27, and Sombart, Werner, *Der moderne Kapitalismus* (Leipzig, 1916), Vol. I, pp. 342 ff.

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich and Cole have objected to the term *civil service* as a "catchword" which facilitates the "maintenance of all that is essential in a bureaucracy without stressing its dubious past." Their objection is based, moreover, upon the grounds that the term refers to a specific legal order only (England and the United States), and that it applies only to the democratic phase of governmental bureaucracy (*op. cit.*, p. 4). However, it is a convenient term to distinguish between the military and other government services, even though somewhat wanting in specificity when so employed.

leading student has put it, "Richelieu in France, Henry VIII and Elizabeth in England, and the Great Elector are among the chief architects who re-constructed the concept of the State, of office, of civil life, and of permanent officials out of the débris of the feudal system."<sup>11</sup> Under their tutelage, the functions of the State were expanded and coordinated, and administration began to stand out as a more and more definite function of government. But in all of these first national services, as they evolved out of feudal relationships, the personal element was paramount and the services were distinctly *royal*, rather than *public*.

The history of the civil service since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is largely a matter of the gradual transformation of the royal into a public service. As the powers of the monarch were encroached upon step by step by the growing power of the representatives of the people, a corresponding shift occurred in the allegiance of the civil servants.<sup>12</sup> Bureaucracies, like all other institutions, reflect the philosophy and temper of the times and in the general political history of a State, that of the public service is writ large. Thus it was that this gradual transfer of allegiance, this revolution which completely transformed the character of the public service, awaited always the outcome of the recurrent struggles between parliament and king. As the monarch gradually lost ground in the unequal contest, control of the civil service passed from his hands to those of the legislature. But this did not occur until after the bureaucracy had been identified in the public mind with oppression, an historical association which has not yet been completely eradicated. In almost every case the transfer of control to the legislature decreased the efficiency of the service and brought with it abuses which are still observable in such countries as France and the United States. One of the most perplexing and troublesome problems of democratic government has been to secure a civil service owing allegiance not to the politicians, nor to a section of the public, but to the whole.

It is difficult to fix an exact date for any of these changes in the allegiance of the public servant. Perhaps we can say that the evolution from a royal to a truly national civil service took place in England during the years between the Revolution of 1688 and the adoption of the principle of open competition in 1870. During these years England suffered from a system of political favoritism, as control was first shared by king and parliament and then finally passed to the politicians alone. The abuses became so serious as to threaten the very welfare of the nation. This menace was recognized and political favoritism was abandoned in the latter part of the nineteenth century in favor of a professionalized and competent civil service.

<sup>11</sup> White, Leonard D., *The Civil Service in the Modern State* (Chicago, 1930), p. xi.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiii. See also the article by Carl J. Friedrich, "The German and the Prussian Civil Service," in the same source, pp. 383-389.



In France, the development of a bureaucracy responsive to the whole nation was begun by the Revolution of 1789, but the separatist character of French thought, together with continued control by the purely political officers, has in a measure prevented its consummation.<sup>13</sup> To a certain extent the history of the civil service in the United States has been similar. Contact with the frontier resulted in an extreme individualistic philosophy which long militated against the development of bureaucracy in the form of a professionalized civil service, and for many years the public servant gave his allegiance not to the State, but to the party or the politician.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps nowhere more than in monarchical Germany has the ideal of an impartial civil service been developed. The German experiment with a liberal democratic State was too brief to make certain what effect popular government would have had on this highly competent and thoroughly disciplined body of public servants.

In general, the years since the seventeenth century have seen the gradual growth in all of the countries of the Western World of a new type of bureaucracy; of a public service marked by allegiance not to one or to the few, but to the nation as a whole, and composed of a professional and expert group of employees. The evolution is not yet complete, but the direction of the trend is unmistakable. To this development a number of factors have contributed, in addition to those already discussed. Among these are the scientific revolution, industrialization, the growth of great cities, and the marked and rapid extension of governmental activity, which has been both a result and a cause of the others.<sup>15</sup>

### THE MODERN BUREAUCRACY

That which is novel about modern State activity . . . is its extent and method . . . the State concentrates upon each individual and weaves his every impulse into the myriad-threaded warp of its existence. No second in the day is unprovided for; and for the many simultaneous events of each second there is the exact and predetermined form or officer. Though some may not admire, few can fail to wonder at, this vast, involved scheme which no single mind has ever completely analysed in even a thousandth part of its extent. The State is everywhere; it leaves hardly a gap. But its difference today from, say, the eighteenth century, is, that whereas in that century it could do little more than claim power by the issue of Statutes, Orders, Proclamations and Rules, now its own professional servants calculate, control and apply those commands. Where the State was wont to issue a Proclamation, it nowadays deposes an officer.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> It has been maintained by some scholars that the French Revolution occurred when it did largely because an adequate administrative organization had not been developed by the French monarchs. See Finer, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 1165.

<sup>14</sup> See Chap. II, below, for a discussion of the struggle to eliminate the spoils system in the United States.

<sup>15</sup> On this point, see Friedrich and Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> Finer, *op. cit.*, pp. 1164 f.