

★ Second, this argument in favor of weakening the national government fails to recognize that, while a government ought to be ordered so that it will not act badly, it must also and preeminently have the capacity to act well. Just as the dangers that the nation may face are illimitable, so are its opportunities. Hamilton always kept in mind (nor did Jefferson ignore) those moments in the life of every nation when it faces great crises and great opportunities, when its course and character may be decisively influenced. And while the decent operation of government from day to day is served by a plurality of interests, by divided government, and by checks on ambition, the times of crisis and greatness demand unity and power and leadership. A constitution should so far as possible provide for both. Checks and balances are still important, and let there be no misunderstanding: decentralization of administration, a continued and even increased emphasis on state and local government where that is possible, and internal checks on ill-conceived action are legitimate and necessary. But conservatives defeat their own purposes when they set themselves against an adequate national government and a strong president and administration just because the popular elements are for them. They do no service to themselves or to the Republic when they adopt a policy of strengthening those elements of the American governmental system whose tendency is to emphasize the separateness of the parts at the expense of those in whose hands it lies to maintain the unity of the whole.

Barber



# 15

## Political Parties and the Bureaucracy

### I

Following a conference at Morningside Heights in September 1952, Senator Robert Taft announced that the Republican candidate for the presidency, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, had "stated without qualification that in the making of appointments at high levels or low levels there will be no discrimination against anyone because he or she has supported me, and that he is determined to maintain the unity of the entire party by taking counsel with all factions and points of view."<sup>1</sup> Thus in the event of a Republican victory, the Taft supporters were to be given a share in the formulation and administration of government policy; and government offices, high and low, were not to be distributed in such a way as to punish the Taft group or to weaken its influence within the Republican party. This was one of the few relatively specific terms of the famous accommodation at Morningside Heights, and it illustrates the persistent and well-known concern of American political parties with government offices. Traditionally the parties have depended upon public offices to sustain themselves as organizations and to give effect to their policies; the civil service is both the trough at which they feed and the instrument by which they govern. In this paper we shall be concerned primarily with the latter part of the relationship.<sup>2</sup>

no patron  
two  
sup  
ex  
pol

If the Eisenhower-Taft agreement illustrates the continued con-

---

This essay was originally published in Robert A. Goldwin, ed., *Political Parties, U.S.A.* (Chicago, Rand McNally & Co., 1964).

1. *New York Times*, September 13, p. 6.

2. For a valuable discussion emphasizing questions arising out of the traditional organizational dependence of parties on patronage, see Harvey C. Mansfield, "Political Parties, Patronage, and the Federal Government Service," *The Federal Government Service* (New York: The American Assembly, Columbia University, 1954), pp. 81-112.



cern of political parties with public offices, the experience of the Eisenhower administration with patronage illustrates (among other things) the extent to which the political party today is limited in its direct access to federal offices for any purpose. In 1952 about 85 percent of the federal service was under the merit system, and much of the remainder was practically unavailable for party purposes, either because the incumbents were needed or because the jobs were, for one reason or another, unattractive. Although the Republicans were accused of raiding the merit system in search of spoils, the steps taken to provide more places for Republicans were in fact very limited. By 1954 the proportion of the service under the merit system had dropped by only 2 or 3 percent. There was, it is true, a certain amount of party "clearance" even for positions filled by examination, but as one historian of the civil service has said, "The pickings for the National Committee have . . . been the leanest in history."<sup>3</sup> There is still some patronage available to the political party, especially at the beginning of a new administration, and the old tree will still produce an occasional plum (such as the 73 federal judgeships created in 1961); but the trend in the direction of the merit system is not likely to be reversed.

This exclusion of the political party from the vast majority of federal offices has not, of course, come about by accident or thoughtless adaptation to changed circumstances. It resulted from a deliberate reform of the American political system which found expression primarily in the Pendleton Act of 1883. As is well known, this act established a bipartisan Civil Service Commission charged, among other things, to provide open competitive examinations for entry into the "classified" federal service. Originally only about 10 percent of the 140,000 positions in the federal service were covered, but provision was made for extensions by executive order. Except for the provision that no person should be removed for failure to contribute time or money to a political party, the act imposed no limitations on removal from office; but limitations were imposed later, especially with respect to veterans. Later legislation also sought to complete the "neutralization" of the public administration by severely limiting the political activities of civil servants.

The post-Civil War reform movement which led to this legislation was directed immediately at the civil service, but its more fundamental objective was the reform of political parties. While the reformers did not seek to eradicate parties, they were, like the

3. Paul P. Van Riper, *History of the United States Civil Service* (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson and Co., 1958), p. 491.

American founders, keenly aware that "party spirit, from the first, has been the terror of republics."<sup>4</sup> It is, George Curtis said, "the one fire that needs no fanning. The first duty of patriotism is to keep that fire low."<sup>5</sup> Specifically, the reformers were trying to rid the country of the spoils system, in which they saw three evils:

1. By distributing public office as the booty of party warfare, the spoils system introduced gross inefficiency and corruption into the public administration.

2. By basing political parties on a network of selfish private relationships, the spoils system distorted and frustrated the expression of the popular will.

3. By channeling men's minds along the lines of private and narrow group interest and away from a concern with the public interest, the spoils system corrupted American political life and character.

Unlike their successors, the early reformers—such men as George Curtis, Dorman Eaton, and Carl Schurz—thought that administrative inefficiency was the least of these evils. "[T]he question whether the Departments at Washington are managed well or badly," said Carl Schurz, "is, in proportion to the whole problem, an insignificant question after all. . . . The most important point to my mind is, how we can remove that element of demoralization which the now prevailing mode of distributing office has introduced into the body-politic."<sup>6</sup> Similarly Dorman Eaton wrote that "civil service reform is not merely a mode of procedure and an economy, but has become a vital question of principle and public morality, involving the counterpoise and in no small degree the stability of the government itself."<sup>7</sup> In an important statement of the object of civil service reform in an editorial for *Harper's Weekly* Schurz conceded that one aim was "an improved conduct of the public business."

But the ultimate end of civil service reform is something far more important than a mere improvement in the machinery of administration. It is to elevate the character of our political

4. "The Relation between Morals and Politics," in Charles E. Norton, ed., *Orations and Addresses of George William Curtis* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1894), vol. 2, p. 124.

5. "The Reason and the Result of Civil Service Reform," *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 387.

6. Speech in the Senate, January 27, 1871, in Frederic Bancroft, ed., *Speeches, Correspondence and Political Papers of Carl Schurz* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1913), vol. 2, p. 123.

7. *Civil Service in Great Britain* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1880), p. 438.



life by eliminating from it as much as possible the demoralizing elements of favoritism and of mercenary motives which under the spoils system have become the moving powers in our politics. It is to rescue our political parties, and in a great measure the management of our public affairs, from the control of men whose whole statesmanship consists in the low arts of office-mongering, and many of whom would never have risen to power had not the spoils system furnished them the means and opportunities for organizing gangs of political followers as mercenary as themselves. It is to restore ability, high character, and true public spirit once more to their legitimate spheres in our public life, and to make active politics once more attractive to men of self-respect and high patriotic aspirations.<sup>8</sup>

Many of the reformers were abolitionists in the controversy over slavery and regarded civil service reform as an extension of the same movement. Having freed the Negro slaves, they argued, it was time to free the civil service from its slavery to political parties. Like the system of chattel slavery, the spoils system corrupts slave, master, and the community that gives it countenance. The reformers' righteous indignation was founded on their conviction that the only two political questions of their time about which reasonable and patriotic men could not differ were Negro slavery and civil service reform. "Since the movement against personal slavery there has been nothing more truly American than this absolutely unselfish and patriotic demand for the emancipation of the Civil Service."<sup>9</sup> In consequence of their abundant and rather rigid morality, the civil service reformers were often scorned as idealistic dreamers, blind to the realities of American politics. But they did more than preach that good government is good. They had a specific, hardheaded program by means of which they proposed to purify American parties and elevate American politics.

8. *Harper's Weekly*, vol. 37 (July 1, 1893), p. 614.

9. "The Administration and Reform," in Norton, *Orations and Addresses of George William Curtis*, vol. 2, p. 359. Another reformer asserted, "no other public issue since the agitation against slavery has been so clearly and incontestably proved as Civil Service Reform. Every other question has two sides and a conclusion must be formed by balancing the advantages and disadvantages of each. . . . But the necessity of abolishing the evils which have accompanied the spoils system seems so clear and the methods proposed so perfectly adapted to the purpose that I find it hard to understand how any unprejudiced mind, after careful study of the subject, can oppose the competitive system." William Dudley Foulke, *Fighting the Spoilsman* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1919), p. 3.

This program and the reasoning on which it was based were given remarkably clear expression by William Dudley Foulke, who was active in the reform movement both nationally and in his own state of Indiana. Foulke explained that there are three major remedies that can be applied to corruption: penal legislation, which is necessary but effective only for the graver crimes; appeal to the moral sense of the community, which is desirable but often ineffective; and removal of the temptation, which is the principle of civil service reform.

(The great purpose of [civil service reform] is not so much to provide an efficient civil service (although it does this) as to remove the temptation to use the offices of the government for personal or party ends, in other words, to remove the incentive to that kind of political corruption which is nourished by the hope of office.) It does this by something akin to a mechanical contrivance, making it automatically impossible for the politician seeking the control of patronage to appoint the particular man he wants. It was the concurrence of personal discretion with party government which brought in the spoils system, and rules requiring appointments by competitive examinations destroy this personal discretion.<sup>10</sup>

Thus while the problem was fundamentally a moral and political one, the solution was found in "something akin to a mechanical contrivance." Without attempting to plumb philosophical depths, the reformers reasoned that the immediate cause of political corruption was the spoils system; the spoils system, in turn, depended upon the discretion of appointing officers in choosing their subordinates. Abolish that discretion and you abolish the spoils system and the corruption flowing from it.

Although this chain of reasoning is not simply wrong, it is certainly insufficient. Civil service reform was not so efficacious as the reformers had expected in purifying politics and raising the moral tone of the community, and it brought new and unanticipated problems. Yet corruption was very considerably reduced, and politics did become less a matter of sheer self-seeking; most people would regard these as gains. One might imagine a moderate reformer asking us to imagine a situation where, not half, but all of the people were moved by nothing but selfish interests and where the political system positively fostered this tendency. Conceive the utter degradation and disaster to which such a system must inevitably lead. These are the

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

↓ → → →  
discretion → spoils → corruption

how elected officials  
change behavior when  
311  
They do or don't have  
discretion — what  
they ask for

not actually  
inculcation  
of virtue, which  
would require  
resisting temptation

was there a  
cause before  
from this  
freedom/discretion?



results which, but for civil service reform, the spoils system might well have produced.

It is undeniable, however, that the reformers grossly oversimplified the problem of popular government. They were inclined to think that, once the spoils system was out of the way, citizens would become pure, leaders noble, and politics patriotic. "[B]y making election, not a fight for plunder, but a contest of principle," civil service reform would make "the honest will of the people the actual government of the country."<sup>11</sup> Although the reformers often described their movement as a return to the original principles of the American republic, they paid too little heed to the founders' warning that a government fit for angels is not fit for men. Confronted with the need to rid American politics of selfishness run riot, they underestimated the enduring force of selfish interests, and consequently they failed to recognize sufficiently the permanent need to take account of such interests. They forgot the wisdom that lay in the founders' "policy of supplying by opposite and rival interests, the defect of better motives. . . ." It is an indication of the extent to which the reformers' ideas still dominate our political thinking that we have to rediscover the lesson that political stability may be found in a politics of interests. And it is ironical that this primary principle of the first American planners and reformers, the Founding Fathers, should now appear in the guise of an argument against planning and reform.

## II

With the passage of the Pendleton Act and the steady extension of the merit system in the federal service, the immediate objectives of the reformers were largely accomplished. Although the question of civil service reform erupted periodically, it ceased to be a major political issue. The reform movement did not die, but it moved from the political arena to the universities. The men associated with the second phase of reform were not primarily agitators, pamphleteers, and politicians, like Schurz and Curtis, but university professors, like Frank Goodnow, or professor-politicians, like Woodrow Wilson.

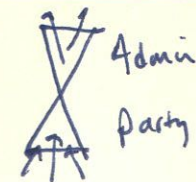
This second generation of reformer-political scientists sought to state systematically the theory of government implicit in the reform movement and to elaborate in more detail its practical consequences. In so doing they established the main lines from which most contem-

11. "The Administration and Reform," in Norton, *Orations and Addresses of George William Curtis*, vol. 2, p. 359.

porary thinking about political parties and public administration derives. The key words are "responsible parties" and "efficient administration." As these men generally saw it, the ideal democracy consists, as it were, of two pyramids joined at the top. The will of the people flows up through the pyramid of politics, where it is collected by political parties and formed into programs of legislation. The programs of the majority party then flow down through the administrative pyramid, where they are implemented in the most efficient manner. According to this theory the prime requisites of a civil service are political neutrality and technical competence. The civil servant is not supposed to make policy. He decides, according to scientifically established technical criteria, the best, that is, most efficient, way to accomplish any given ends. Those ends are set by his political superiors, who are responsible through the party to the people.

In spite of some fairly obvious difficulties, this theory proved to be extremely durable, because it seems to state simply and clearly the whole problem of democratic government: to ensure the free expression and the efficient implementation of the popular will. With customary diligence and thoroughness the academicians set about investigating and explaining how the pyramid of politics and the pyramid of administration ought to be governed, each according to its proper principle. Proposals for the reform of political parties as such are dealt with in other papers in this series [see source note above], but it is significant that these proposals have fared much worse than proposals for the reform of administration. Thus while the report of the American Political Science Association *A More Responsible Two-Party System* has produced little but mild academic controversy, its predecessor and intellectual companion, the 1937 report of the President's Committee on Administrative Management, was widely accepted and largely implemented. A new and vigorous discipline of administration has grown up within the universities, and it trains and fosters a huge corps of professional administrators. Public administration today is subjected to continuous and exhaustive analysis, and a stream of proposals for improvement flows out of universities, research bureaus, and government offices. Administrative theorists and practitioners seem to have moved steadily forward in their understanding, improvement, and conduct of public administration.

So successful is this movement that there has been a tendency to ignore the crucial question of the proper connection between administration and politics. The stock answer is that of course the political master gives the orders, but he should not meddle in the activities of





his administrative servants; if he does he will only get in the way of the efficient implementation of his own orders. "Administrative questions are not political questions," Wilson said. "Although politics sets the tasks for administration, it should not be suffered to manipulate its offices."<sup>12</sup> It is true that even the most ardent proponents of a neutral civil service rarely went so far as to assert that the intermediate and lower levels of public administration could be altogether free of direct political influence. There were even some doubts whether political control at the top could ever be sufficient to keep the administration politically responsible; but generally students and reformers of administration were too busy extending the merit system, neutralizing the civil service, and devising principles of administration to concern themselves much with the "external" problem of political control. In any case, the logic of the two pyramids, joined somehow at their respective peaks, seemed to settle the question in principle, whatever the practical difficulties.

In addition to its beguiling symmetry, this theory of government seemed to find powerful support in that country to which Americans have always looked for political instruction. One of the first shots in the early battle for civil service reform was Dorman Eaton's book on the civil service in Britain; and later Woodrow Wilson saw in the British system "perfected party government."<sup>13</sup> In Britain, the reformers explained, responsible, disciplined, centralized, programmatic parties compete for public favor. In Parliament the party programs are formed into legislation which is then handed to an efficient, unbiased, politically neutral civil service for execution. The link between the political and the administrative pyramids is provided by the cabinet and, above all, the prime minister: leader of the House of Commons, chief of his political party, and head of the administration.

While many administrators and students of administration are still content to work quietly in the cloister of the neutral-civil-service idea, others have discovered that the world is not so reasonable or so simple as they were taught in the "reform" school; and, like small boys in similar circumstances, they find a good deal of naughty pleasure in telling everyone about it. In spite of the extension of the

12. Woodrow Wilson, "The Study of Administration," *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 56 (December 1941), p. 494.

13. Woodrow Wilson, *Congressional Government* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), p. 91.

merit system and the application of ever more sophisticated principles of administration, there seems to be as much "politics" in federal administration as there ever was. Administration is not, it appears, simply a matter of drawing logical deductions from a general statement of policy. No general statement can be so exhaustive as to permit the civil servant to act on the basis of a series of purely technical calculations, even if he were willing to do so. He is inevitably left with some discretion; he has to exercise his judgment; he has to participate in the making of policy. This is, of course, especially true at the higher levels, but the same principle applies, often in very significant ways, at lower levels as well.

If, then, we need a vast administration staffed largely by permanent officials and if they cannot be confined to merely technical decisions, the result of the attempt to neutralize the civil service is likely to be not a perfectly efficient and responsive executive machine, but a bureaucratic monster. A civil service free of detailed political control, trained in a purely instrumental science of administration, and insulated from the political life of the community will not be nonpolitical; but it will be politically irresponsible. The spoils system, whatever its other effects, did at least ensure that the bureaucracy shared the political character of the community at large. There is not much serious consideration of going back to the spoils system, but it is argued very strongly that the civil service, being a political institution, must be *representative* of the political community that it serves if it is to be responsible. To the extent that the interests, opinions, and values of civil servants are intimately bound up with those of the community as a whole, any separate "bureaucratic" will or spirit will be out of the question.

Fortunately, in this view, the American civil service does represent the American society with a fair degree of faithfulness. Government offices are not reserved for any favored class or group, and educational prerequisites are usually modest. Appointment depends mainly on an individual's capacity to "do the job," thus permitting representation within the civil service of the diverse political, racial, ethnic, and religious groups which make up the American community. Moreover, entry is not restricted to the bottom rungs of the administrative ladder or to persons just out of school, so there is a constant and healthy infusion of new blood at all levels and a considerable movement between private life and the civil service. The proponents of a "representative bureaucracy" tend to be suspicious of "closed" career systems where there is little or no entry except at the bottom level and where the members ordinarily expect to spend their whole professional lives. The military services have, of course,



long been open to suspicion on these grounds. Another favorite object of attack has been the foreign service, where long periods of residence outside the United States, the filling of higher positions exclusively from within the service, and a highly developed esprit de corps are seen to carry a threat of a rigid "inbred" bureaucracy, indifferent or hostile to American democratic values.

It seems, then, that the civil service reform movement has been turned on its head. The early reformers sought, as we have seen, to take the civil service out of politics and politics out of the civil service. A neutral civil service, properly organized and trained, was supposed to serve one party or to implement one policy just as willingly as any other. More than that, such a civil service could in principle be transplanted from one political environment to a totally different one, because there was thought to be, as Woodrow Wilson said, "but one rule of good administration for all governments alike."<sup>14</sup> In recent years the idea of a neutral civil service has lost ground. It is now widely recognized that politics and administration are not capable of such a strict separation and that, in fact, all interesting administrative questions are political questions. It is seen to be futile and dangerous to attempt to deprive the civil service of a political function and a political character. The problem, rather, is to see that the civil service has a political character that will cause it to perform its political function well. That has been thought to require in the United States a thoroughly democratic or representative civil service. What began as a movement to neutralize the civil service has become a movement to democratize it.

#### IV

Different as this view of a thoroughly democratized civil service is from the older one of a thoroughly neutralized civil service, they have one fundamental feature in common. Both assume that the civil service is an agency which ought to be responsive to the will or "values" of the people; both deny that the civil service should exercise a political will of its own. Only by questioning this common assumption is it possible to grasp the fundamental significance of the political role of the modern civil service. In the remainder of this paper we must consider the modern civil service not simply as an instrument of elected officials or as a reflector of widespread values, but as a political agency in its own right, endowed with certain qualities which give it a reasonable and legitimate claim to share in

14. *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 56, December 1941, p. 502.

rule.<sup>15</sup> We may begin with the 1955 Hoover Commission's proposal to establish in the federal government a "senior civil service."<sup>16</sup>

Although the Hoover Commission made a wide range of suggestions for improvement, it would have left the bulk of the federal service substantially unchanged in character. The civil service would have remained heavily specialized, open to entry at all levels, and as thoroughly "representative" of American life as before. But at the very top level, the commission proposed to form the best civil servants into an elite corps. The commission warned against a blanket inclusion of all top civil servants into the new cadre, for this would defeat the purpose of establishing a small, necessarily exclusive corps of public servants of the very highest quality. These senior civil servants would be expected to exercise a strict political neutrality; they would refrain from defending controversial policies before Congress and from making other public statements which might taint them with partisanship and thus undermine their usefulness as civil servants. Indeed, the commission was criticized for trying to revive the old idea of a perfectly neutral civil service along British lines. It is true that the Hoover Commission, like the old civil service reformers, drew heavily (though in this case silently) on British experience; but the evidence suggests that its understanding of how British government works was considerably better.

The British civil service was not, is not, and could not be "neutral" in the sense in which the early reformers understood that term: a well-tuned machine responding automatically to whatever political instructions are fed into it. The official conduct of the British civil servant is certainly characterized by a scrupulous neutrality as between political parties. Even his private opinions are unlikely to be strongly partisan, though there are less severe formal restrictions on his political activities than on those of his American counterpart. But, far from resting on a purely technical concern with administration, this nonpartisanship rests on the agreement between the civil service and the political parties on political fundamentals. The civil servant knows that he can serve faithfully even a party with which he has serious disagreement, because in these party matters reasonable and honorable Britons may differ. Somewhat remote from the most active

15. For a comparative and typological study along these lines, see Fritz Morstein Marx, *The Administrative State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

16. Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government, *Personnel and Civil Service and Task Force Report on Personnel and Civil Service* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1955).



sphere of political life, he is likely to acquire a habitual moderation, avoiding extremes and reminding himself that his disagreements with his political superior about the issues of the day are insignificant compared with the deep agreement on which they rest. The British civil servant is "neutral," not because he is above all a civil servant but because he is above all British.

Thus the British civil servant's neutrality or, more precisely, nonpartisanship, has a political base. He can stand aloof from disputes between parts of the body politic precisely because he shares so thoroughly in the consensus about the character of the whole. But he also has a positive political role. While he carries out party programs with which he may disagree, he also helps to modify the partisanship of his political superiors. To give but one example, Labour partisans often expressed, prior to 1945, a doubt whether the predominantly middle-class civil service would loyally and effectively carry out the programs of a Labour government. When the test came, not only did the civil service not sabotage Labour programs, but there was surprisingly little evidence of bureaucratic dragging of feet. According to Labour's prime minister, "There were certainly some people in the Labour Party who doubted whether the civil servants would give fair play to a socialist government, but all doubts disappeared with experience."<sup>17</sup>

It is true that the responsiveness of the civil service to Labour programs was helped by the changed social and political composition of the service, though there was least change in the crucial top ranks. But it is also true that the Labour government proved to be much less of a threat to the fundamental political consensus than many, including many Labourites, had expected. Quite a different situation would have existed had Labour really tried to engineer a socialist revolution and had it cast aside the traditional institutions and conventions that contain British political life—and a different civil service would have been required. As it was, the old civil service dog certainly learned and loyally performed some new Labour tricks, but the Labour ministers also learned something from the civil service. As one of those ministers, Herbert Morrison, described it:

The relationship between the Minister and the civil servants should be—and usually is—that of colleagues working together in a team, co-operative partners seeking to advance the public interest and the efficiency of the Department. . . .

17. The Right Hon. The Earl Attlee, "Civil Servants, Ministers, Parliament and the Public," in William A. Robson, ed., *The Civil Service in Britain and France* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1956), p. 16.

The partnership should be alive and virile, rival ideas and opinions should be fairly considered, and the relationship of all should be one of mutual respect—on the understanding, of course, that the Minister's decision is final and must be loyally and helpfully carried out, and that he requires efficient and energetic service.<sup>18</sup>

But does this kind of partnership have any meaningful or legitimate application in the United States? Obviously there are difficulties standing in the way of a transfer of British institutions to American shores. Thus for example, although the call of the Hoover Commission for strict "political neutrality" by the senior civil service did not (contrary to the views of some critics) imply acceptance of the old idea of a merely technical civil service, it was open to the criticism that it took too little account of the complex internal articulation of the American political system. Granting the validity of this criticism does not, however, necessarily mean that the notion of a partnership between political party leaders and civil servants is inapplicable in the United States, although it does point to the different and more complex form that an American partnership must take.

This question of the kind of political neutrality that can be expected or desired of American civil servants is closely connected with a feature of the American Constitution that has long embarrassed party and civil service reformers, namely the system of checks and balances. The reformers, firmly persuaded by the logic of the two pyramids (that elaboration of a misunderstanding of British government), tended to regard the separation of powers as a "defect" in the American system, to be remedied either by drastic constitutional change or through the informal agency of reformed parties in control of a reformed administration. Even in their most generous and patriotic mood, they could scarcely see in this central feature of the American Constitution anything but a curiosity of the eighteenth-century mind—a once harmless nuisance grown under modern conditions into an intolerable obstacle to responsible and efficient government. [The very fact that the civil service is constitutionally not simply subordinate to either the president or the Congress tends to obscure lines of command and, incidentally, to increase the political influence of the civil service.] It is easy to see why the reformers, with their idea of a neutral civil service, thought that such a system could produce nothing but confusion and irresponsibility.

[If, however, the civil service is regarded not as a neutral instru-

18.   
sity P1



ment but as a political institution, then the constitutional system of checks and balances appears in a different light. While the framers of the Constitution doubtless failed to anticipate the full significance of the administrative state, there is nevertheless a close harmony between the original intention of the system of checks and balances and the political role of the modern civil service. Without entering fully into this subject, we may say that the system of checks and balances was an attempt to institutionalize moderation; and one of the important ways it does this in modern American government is by adding to the political weight of the civil service which, more than any of the other active agencies of government, stands for moderation. Of course the founders recognized that their "inventions of prudence" were not a sufficient condition of good government and might sometimes prove a positive handicap, and we must recognize the same about a politically influential civil service. But if the civil service is a political institution with a political function, it does not appear unreasonable that it should have some political power. In what follows we shall consider what the bureaucracy, in partnership with political parties, can and does contribute to American government.<sup>19</sup>

## V

One manifestation of the basic problem of government by political parties is the fact that politicians who run for office in their capacity as leaders of organized parts, or parties, of the body politic are expected to assume a responsibility for the government of the whole. This formulation is obviously incomplete. American political parties themselves undertake to form particular individuals, groups, interests, and opinions into some kind of whole. This is not the place to discuss this broad responsibility or the various means by which American parties discharge it. It may be observed, however, that one means is the appointment of men who are not distinctively party men to fill even high political positions, to say nothing of the appointment of members of the opposite party. Rexford Tugwell was not a Democrat in the same sense as James Farley; Charles Wilson was not a Republican in the same sense as Arthur Summerfield. And Harvard professors, it may be assumed, are not Democrats in the same sense as persons whose whole career is associated with that party. Yet in spite of this and other qualifications, the fact remains that in a

19. Of what follows it may be said, with Sir William Blackstone, "This is the spirit of our constitution: not that I assert it is in fact quite so perfect as I have here endeavoured to describe it. . . ." *Commentaries*, vol. 1, p. 172.

very important sense our system of government gives to a part the responsibility for governing the whole.

It is notorious that party politicians tend to learn moderation and responsibility when in office; but it is perhaps less generally recognized that one of their main teachers is the civil service. The common contrast between the politician, as the "practical man" experienced in "real life" and in touch with the wants and needs of the people, and the bureaucrat, as the remote, paper-shuffling office boy, is grossly overdrawn. In the first place, many civil servants have, in their particular fields, a kind of direct contact with the people and experience of the problems of government which even the politician whose ear never leaves the ground cannot possibly match. Moreover, modern government is to a large extent conducted by "shuffling papers," and it is of vital importance that they be shuffled well. Finally, a large part of the proposals for new policies and legislation come up through the civil service. Not only do civil servants exercise discretion in interpreting and applying the commands of their political superiors; they participate intimately in the formulation of those commands. They make proposals of their own and fight for them; they comment on the proposals of their political superiors—and may fight against them. They make a vital contribution to the process of deciding what is to be done. Government would come to a standstill if our "closet statesmen" in the civil service suddenly started doing only what they were told.

In the United States, of course, due partly to the constitutional system of checks and balances, the civil servant does not and perhaps cannot be expected to confine his statesmanship to the closet. Indeed, one of the peculiarities of American public administration is the fact that the civil servant may have more political knowledge and skill, even in the rather narrow sense, than his "political" superior. And he is almost certain to have, at least at first, more familiarity with the politics involved in actually running the government. A new secretary or assistant secretary will normally find himself heavily dependent upon his experienced civil servants to facilitate not only the internal management of the agency but also its relations with Congress, interested organizations, other agencies of government, and even the White House itself. Compared with his counterpart in England, the American political executive has, generally speaking, to steer through political waters that are more cloudy and turbulent and to do it with less training and experience. Little wonder that he has to place extensive trust in the political judgment of experienced pilots in the civil service.

It is true that much of the contribution of the civil service to the



art of government, even in the United States, is of a restraining and even negative kind. The civil servant, especially at the higher levels, has seen many programs tried, and many failures; even the successful innovations have usually fallen short of their makers' hopes. His experience has caused him to be sensitive to difficulties; he is an expert in seeking out unanticipated consequences. Even after a new policy has been decided upon, the civil servant is likely to explain, perhaps at exasperating length, why it cannot possibly be carried out the way his political chief wants. The civil servant is full of procedures, rules, and regulations, and he will (if he is performing properly) instruct his chief in the reasons for them. Orderly administration is not the most important quality of good government and it may sometimes have to be sacrificed to higher ends, but it is, generally speaking, indispensable. The cautious prudence and orderliness which tend to characterize the civil service are precisely that part of practical wisdom in which the party politician is likely to be deficient. The political leader in the United States is at least as much in need of the "prudent counsel and efficient aid" of "able and judicious men" as was the English statesman of the nineteenth century addressed by Sir Henry Taylor;<sup>20</sup> and he will find many of them in the civil service.

The special kind of practical wisdom that characterizes the civil servant points to a more fundamental political function of the bureaucracy, namely to bring to bear on public policy its distinctive view of the common good or its way of looking at questions about the common good. The preoccupation of the civil service with rules and regulations, for example, is not aimed merely at orderly administration, important as that is. The rules and regulations, and the principle that there should be rules and regulations, represent a certain principle of justice, if only the principle of treating equals equally. Similar considerations apply to the civil servant's predilection for the way things have been done in the past. Generally speaking, to follow precedents is orderly, reasonable, and fair. One of the basic principles of American government is that governmental action should ordinarily be taken on the basis of established rules, however irritating that may sometimes be to a politician with a substantive program to put through. Like judges, civil servants have a special responsibility to preserve the rule of law.

Civil servants also bear a similarity to judges in their possession of what is, for most practical purposes, permanent tenure in office. Of course, like judges, they are influenced by the election returns—and it would be dangerous if they were not; but they have a degree

20. *The Statesman* (New York: Mentor Books, 1958), p. 108.

of insulation from shifting political breezes. The rhythm of their official lives and thoughts is not governed so strictly as is that of the political executive by periodic elections. Their position enables them to mitigate the partisanship of party politics, and it gives them some protection from the powerful temptation, to which the party politician is always subject, to serve the people's inclinations rather than their interests. ✓

Clement Attlee described the higher civil servant in Britain as having, in addition to long personal experience, "that mysterious tradition of the office wherein is somehow embalmed the wisdom of past generations."<sup>21</sup> The civil service in the United States is of course far less time-encrusted, but here too the higher civil servant will ordinarily have long experience in government, nearly always longer than his political chiefs. Moreover the duties of the civil servant and the way he works—his concern for written records, for example—tend to make him conscious of the "long-termness" of political decisions to a degree that is unusual for transient party politicians.

At its best, the civil service is a kind of democratic approximation to a hereditary aristocracy whose members are conscious of representing an institution of government which extends into the past and into the future beyond the life of any individual member. In our mobile democracy, the civil service is one of the few institutions we have for bringing the accumulated wisdom of the past to bear upon political decisions. beautiful ✕

Perhaps the most important political contribution that a civil service can make is, of all those we have considered, the one the American civil service makes least. Neither the bureaucracy nor political parties merely "represent" or reflect the American polity; they also help to shape and guide that polity, and they perform this function by what they are as well as by what they do. The character of a country's public servants is one of the determinants of the character of its people. When George Washington sought honest, honorable, and loyal gentlemen to fill the public offices of the new country, he was concerned not only with getting the work of government done but also with distributing the patronage of government in such a way as to set the public stamp of approval on certain human qualities. When Andrew Jackson established the system of rotation in public office, he had the same broad objective in mind, but he sought to elevate the common man in the place of the gentleman. And what the civil service reformers feared most about the spoils system was the effect on the political character of the people of the

21. Robson, *The Civil Service in Britain and France*, p. 17.



example set by the kind of men which the spoils system tended to elevate. "Politics cannot be made a mere trade," George Curtis argued, "without dangerously relaxing the moral character of the country."<sup>22</sup> In the words of Dorman Eaton,

It is in the struggles for office, and the opportunities for gain in the exercise of official power, that selfishness, deception, and partisan zeal have their everlasting contest with virtue, patriotism, and duty. It is in that contest that statesmen and demagogues, patriots and intriguers, the good citizen and the venal office seeker, all the high and all the low influences of political life, meet face to face, and by the balance of power, for good or for evil, give character to politics and determine the morality of nations.<sup>23</sup>

Except for the removal of corruption, however, the reformers gave little thought to the kind of character and morality which their neutral, merely technical civil service would exemplify. One indication of the result is the fact that American civil servants themselves, though they may be thoroughly devoted to serving the common good, ordinarily prefer to identify themselves by their profession or occupation or "job" rather than by their public service. It is thought more respectable to be an agricultural economist or a personnel specialist than to be a civil servant. Not the least of the merits of the Hoover Commission proposal for a senior civil service is the influence such a corps of public servants might have on American life and character by restoring to a place of honor and respect the title of "civil servant."

The civil service is, then, in possession of certain institutional qualities which give it a title to share with elected officials in rule. It has a distinctive competence in the art of government and a unique knowledge of the problems of government, without which stable and intelligent government under modern conditions would be literally impossible. It has, moreover, a distinctive view of the common good which can guide and supplement the view likely to be taken by elected party politicians. On the foundation of its procedures, its rules, its institutional memory and foresight, its traditions, its skepticism of political panaceas, and its protection from the whims of popularity, the civil service stands for the continuity and wholeness of American government.

22. Dorman Eaton, "The Reform of the Civil Service," in *Orations and Addresses*, vol. 2, p. 43.

23. Robson, *Civil Service in Great Britain*, pp. 423-24.

## VI

It is not to be denied that bureaucracy suffers characteristic limitations and defects. Neither the party politician nor the bureaucrat has an unqualified claim to rule; neither is unqualifiedly competent or entitled to act on behalf of the whole people. Under ordinary circumstances the actual conduct of American government is in the charge of a partnership between them. We have emphasized the contributions of the bureaucratic part of this partnership, because they are less generally understood. But as the civil servant teaches, so also he is taught by the party politician. The civil servant is likely, for example, to overdo his concern with procedures and rules. He may be blind to the fact that procedural justice can do substantive injustice. It may be necessary for his political chief to show him that procedures have become so complex as to defeat their purpose or that the original reason for a rule has disappeared. While the civil servant may take a longer view of the common good, his view may also be distorted by a preoccupation with one program or a rather narrow range of programs. The broader range of responsibilities of the political chief may provide a corrective.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, although the civil servant bears the immediate responsibility for government because he does (or is closer to) the actual governing, he does not bear the final responsibility. He may instruct his political chief, he may advise him, guide him, even manage him—but he does not have the last word. This means that he may be overruled, for good reasons or bad; but it also means that his way of thinking and acting is molded in part by the fact of his formal subordination. Even at his best he is not a political captain but a faithful, wise, and influential counselor and servant.<sup>25</sup>

24. As one civil service bureau chief explained, "The assistant secretary and I deal with the same people and do many of the same sorts of things, but the task of the assistant secretary is to keep me from losing touch with the mass of the people, from becoming too ingrown. The political executive provides that sensitivity to the public pulse. He and I approach our similar jobs from different angles. If we can learn to talk each other's language, we make a good team." Marver H. Bernstein, *The Job of the Federal Executive* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1958), p. 49.

25. "I remember that I went to my new secretary and said: 'I think a man coming into your job should have his own men around him. I am a career employee, but if you should decide to have your own man in this job, I hope you will first give me a trial because I think I can help you. But if you decide to have your own man, there will be no difficulty about it. All you need to do is tell me. If you want to try me first, I will attempt to give you all the facts bearing on your particular problem, and I will give them to you as accurately and impartially as I can. You will have to have faith in me until you learn to know me better. If you want me to make a recommendation, I



This is connected with a final limitation of bureaucracy. Although a good civil service is one of the guardians of the traditional political wisdom of a regime, "sometimes it is necessary," as Attlee says, "to react violently against the tradition which was formed for a different state of society."<sup>26</sup> While it is difficult to imagine Lord Attlee reacting violently against anything, it is clear that traditional bureaucratic wisdom may not suit changed circumstances. The very tradition which it is the responsibility of the bureaucrat to carry forward may require fundamental redefinition, and that is a task for which his duties, training, and experience disqualify him. During such times of crisis, "administration" does become radically subordinate to "politics"; the institution of the civil service does become to a much greater extent than usual an instrument of the man who is president.

personal  
leadership  
replaces  
"rational"  
bureaucratic  
authority

loyalty  
much  
more  
important

The peak of the spoils system is generally regarded as having come during Lincoln's first administration, and Lincoln removed the incumbents of almost all offices under his immediate control. He used the spoils of office to help bind together the Republican party, the North, and thereby the Union. So much was this the paramount aim that, according to one historian, Lincoln "made no attempt to obtain the men best fitted to perform the functions of the various offices, except in case of the very highest; for minor places he did not even insist that a man be fit."<sup>27</sup> The Civil War is an extreme example, but it is not the only one. The transformation which the civil service underwent at the hands of Franklin Roosevelt is well known. Roosevelt gave a new meaning to the civil service and to the Democratic party in the course of giving a new meaning to American political life as a whole. During such critical times, the question of bureaucracy as such is almost entirely subordinated to the more fundamental question of political reconstruction. It is not unfair to say of the bureaucracy (and perhaps of political parties too) that it contributes least to government in the most important cases, provided it is remembered that a government requires a capacity for everyday competence, prudence, and public-spiritedness, as well as a capacity for greatness.

will do so. If we get to the point where I cannot live with your decisions, I will get out. I will fight you outside the government, but I won't do so in the government. I won't make any end runs on you. Now, you don't know me from Adam, and you never heard of me before in all likelihood. You don't know whether I am going to live up to that statement or not. You will have to take it on faith.' The secretary really needed me, but he didn't know it yet. As it turned out, we got along very well." Ibid., p. 191.

26. Robson, *The Civil Service in Britain and France*, p. 17.

27. Carl Russell Fish, *The Civil Service and the Patronage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), p. 170.

## 16

## Leonard D. White and the Study of Public Administration

Leonard D. White did not plant the seeds from which the field of public administration grew; but for four decades he tended that garden with unexcelled devotion. Carefully cultivating, pruning, and transplanting, he sought to understand and to make clear to others the plan of the whole and to articulate the details of the several parts. The vast majority of students of public administration today were shaped at least in part by their exposure to White. Many have seen no need to leave the paths that he laid out or improved. Others have found White's landscape too restrictive. Yet all must, in one way or another, come to terms with it as a vital part of coming to terms with their field of study.

## Introduction

This chapter is designed to assist and deepen that confrontation. No reference is made to White's universally acknowledged qualities as administrator, teacher, and gentleman, or to his numerous specific contributions to the study and practice of public administration.<sup>1</sup> Our concern is with his attempts to give definition to the whole. It will be argued here that throughout his career White was concerned with a fundamental contradiction that lay and still lies at the heart of the study of public administration, and that in the work of his later years he provided his best advice on the approach to that study. The focus will be on White's *Introduction to the Study of Public Administration*, the

This essay was originally published in *Public Administration Review*, vol. 25, March 1965. Reprinted with permission from Public Administration Review, copyright by the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), 1120 G Street NW, Suite 700, Washington, D.C. 20005. All rights reserved.

1. See John M. Gaus, "Leonard Dupee White—1891–1958," *Public Administration Review* (Summer 1958).