BUREAUCRACY IS NOT ALWAYS NEEDED FOR STABILITY

Patrick Dunleavy

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RJ *Dear Professor Dunleavy, do you think that in Russia, Western countries, and in the developing countries of Asia and Latin America, the bureaucracy constitutes a separate social stratum that is different, on the one hand, from entrepreneurs and, on the other hand, from intellectuals? What are the special features of this stratum, and can we consider it to be a class or an order? Do you suppose that bureaucracy can in some part be identified with the middle class?*

In old-style bureaucratic systems, based on Max Weber's model, people were encouraged to work within it as a life-long career. People would enter into a career in their twenties and continue on until their sixties. I do think that such a bureaucracy forms a very distinct social stratum. **This model used to be very common, particularly in France, Japan, and Russia**, but it has generally been on the decline in the modern world. The majority of Anglo-Saxon countries, such as America and the UK, have moved to a different system where government is now quite small, and as a result has a relatively small staff. Several key tasks, such as running the government computers, which are very essential for raising taxes and paying welfare-payments and coordinating the defense complex and defense activities – all of these thing are now largely being done by big private-sector contractors. Furthermore, people move in and out of the public service sector much more often. **It is much less common for people to start in their twenties and spend forty years in public service.** Thus, I don't think that the bureaucracy is a distinct social class or social group in countries like the United States or the UK.

As for peculiarities of the old-style bureaucratic systems, I think that on the whole they tend to be quite conservative. They don't change very fast and they tend to be very old-fashioned in their business processes; they tend to be very labor-intensive, rather wasteful of course, and rarely do they guarantee effectiveness. As a result, the government will often try to reduce the proportion of administrative expenditures involved in the government sector.

RJ *Since the 19th century, especially in Russia, bureaucracy has been traditionally opposed to society. Do you think that this contrast is still valid today? If so, what kind of concrete reasons could you give for setting the bureaucracy against society?*

The generally accepted model, particularly in Western countries, is that there are two kinds of relationships between bureaucracy and society. What's important to notice is how the relationship is articulated within a liberal democracy.

We can look at countries like Britain and America, which both employ a type of working liberal-democratic system. They both have a working political system, with a system of checks and balances, as well as civil liberties and civil rights. Importantly, they had all of these things long before the emergence of the modern bureaucratic systems that has since been brought in to run their administration. **So, bureaucracy was not needed for political stability in these countries.** These countries had achieved political stability before the advent of any bureaucracy.

By contrast, if you look at countries like France, which had lots of revolutionary uprisings in the 1790s, in 1830, in 1848, and in 1870, there were so many regime changes that it was never able to properly organize a stable process for political succession. As a consequence, France came to develop its famous state bureaucracy. They tried to create a kind of central core of a strong state that could operate despite the ongoing political turbulence. This model of a strong bureaucracy operating as a core of the state, and hence quite separate and cut off from society, demonstrates its potential for opposing and being antagonistic to big social interests.

Such a model was also used by countries like Prussia, united Germany, and Japan. It was also certainly used in Russia, which had a long period of political modernization that required a bureaucratic setting. And then, of course, **Russia had revolutions that required a very strong bureaucratic state for another 50-60 years in order to maintain stability.** So it seems clear why there would be a kind of pressure to maintain a strong state in countries that originally lacked any strong, well-grounded, and consistent liberal democratic practices. And the key thing here in judging the maturity of a liberal democracy is whether it can sustain a painless and peaceful succession of leadership, in which the dominant party loses and a new party takes over. This only just happened in Japan two years ago. And it has never happened in Russia. ■

Patrick Dunleavy was speaking with Nikita Kurkin and Yulia Netesova