

## The Dilemmas of Civil Servants in an Authoritarian State

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*The inadequacy of the politics/administration dichotomy to sufficiently explain the actual operations of a bureaucracy is exacerbated in authoritarian states where the gap between rhetoric and action is apparent, i.e. the state is unable to deliver goods and services, the merit system does not work, and there is a weakening of the nation's moral fiber. The tendency for civil servants to be politicized either for their own selves (which is corruption) or for the public interest (which is committed political action) becomes more pronounced. The latter can either take the form of (1) personal sacrifice, (2) brinkmanship, (3) distancing oneself from the regime and (4) open dissent. However, what is needed is increased organized commitment on the part of civil servants and a corresponding democratization of effective political power to those in the lower levels.*

The field of public administration was born as a formal discipline in 1887, with the publication of Woodrow Wilson's seminal article, "The Study of Administration."<sup>1</sup> That article and the others that followed it gave a convincing academic stamp to the desire of political leaders then to boot out government by rotation — the spoils system — and establish in its stead a government bureaucracy based on merit. Wilson justified the development of a permanent, expert bureaucracy in the light of the fact that in a democracy,

it has forbidden us to hope . . . for any quick schooling of the sovereign (the people) in executive expertness or in the conditions of perfect functional balance in government.

The arena of politics is "hurry and strife," but administration can be a science, a profession, a politically neutral technique. Career office holders provide the expertise for undertaking the wishes of the people to whom, through the political officials, they are ultimately responsible. Further theoretical support was provided by Max Weber who characterized bureaucracy, a hierarchical large-scale organization, as the most rational system of administration, which in its efficient performance manifests the culmination of the process of secularization of society.<sup>2</sup> Incidentally, Weber is generally seen as a conservative follower of Marx, whose works are now read

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as precursors of rational decisionmaking, even scientism. But, following Zeitlin, I see in Weber a strong thread of Marx's concept of concentration of power and alienation.<sup>3</sup> The separation of workers from the means of production he generalized to the separation of members of large organizations from the means of power. He used as examples control of the means of politics, of the means of violence and of the means of scientific research as ways of dominating human beings, with the bureaucracy as one such major instrument of power.

However, unlike later interpretations of his work (prevalent in public administration), Weber did not read from this that the human being in these organizations thereby become robots able to follow only the bidding of the master. At another point, he stated that domination requires:

the human conduct be conditioned to obedience towards those masters *who claim to be the bearers of legitimate power.*<sup>4</sup>

In his definition of power, he recognized that participants have conflicting aims and interests even as members of the same bureaucracy. Three things are then important to remember from Weber:

(1) Bureaucracy is an instance of the concentration of power and of the separation of individuals from the means of producing power.

(2) Given the conflicting interests of persons in the organization, power is the chance of a person or a group of persons to realize its own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others in the organization.

(3) One source of power for this controller is his claim to legitimacy. If the claim is accepted by others, there would be less resistance to his directives.

We thus arrive at a point where neo-Marxists and traditional PA scholars are now converging, namely, that efficiency cannot be the sole guide for state management, that the legitimacy problem leads both to the need for introducing political and moral criteria in decision making, and inevitably to criticism of state policy and dissent within the bureaucracy itself.

The politics-administration dichotomy gained acceptance for at least four reasons:

(1) It enshrined expertise and technical knowledge as a major requirement of the civil service.

(2) It allowed the bureaucracy to be linked to democracy by recog-

nizing that only elected — or at least duly legitimated — officials make decisions for the state. Bureaucrats are accountable to the people through their political leaders.

(3) Following from this, the dichotomy lends credence to the label of members of the bureaucracy as “civil servants,” supposed to carry out the will of the people, and to look at their vocation as a way of serving the public interest.

(4) It legitimizes a system of administration whose members are not tested, in recruitment or later, as to their partisan political views, or even as to their understanding of the people’s will. The bureaucracy is to be regarded as a technical body, carrying out orders like a machine.

As facts about the behavior of bureaucrats seeped back into scholars, it became known that the theory indeed describes an ideal type. It has been accepted since that

(1) Bureaucrats are not robots; they make choices on even routinized, ministerial functions. They bring their values, their personal ambitions, and their own insights and interpretations to the office.

One also has to recognize that civil servants do not live in a vacuum. The official is not separated from the person, despite Weber’s description. The servant brings his or her class, provincial origin, school ties, gender, family problems, etc., to work. In addition, he or she faces more or less strong pressures from superiors, colleagues, subordinates, clients, profession and society at large.

(2) Political leaders alone are not necessarily adequate vessels for expressing the popular will or even in making policies that are clear-cut, understandable and directly implementable.

These combined to make it blatantly obvious that the civil servants maintain a lot of power to make decisions not only on how to implement policy but on even how to create new, modified, or improved products. In other words, they wield power. Many legislative proposals are drafted in the bureaucracy and after enactment, these policies are implemented by the same persons who conceived of them in the first place.

Bureaucrats participate in higher levels of policy making as well as in the humdrum administrative details. For instance, they may not be publicly involved in the decision to liberalize requirements for foreign investments although they may have had a hand in drafting it. But they may make the rules and procedures so easy (if for them) or so stiff (if against) that they make or change policy in the process.

Even mundane matters of implementation can be instances of the practice of power. As an example, they may not be able to decide where to locate a steel mill (because political officials jealously guard this prerogative) but if they did not want the mill located in the designated area, they can delay implementation for years until people forget that there was ever any plan to build it. Or they may make qualification requirements for program beneficiaries so vague as to include everyone, or so stringent that they include no one except persons they designate. And so on.

Nevertheless, it was the unadulterated version of the politics-administration dichotomy that was exported to ex-colonial states in the technical assistance period following World War II. It is still taught as such in many schools in the Third World.

Still, the politics-administration dichotomy remains important for one thing. It provides the bottom line. The civil servants are deemed accountable. And it is not mere answerability to their immediate superior or to the manager as it would be in a private factory. Members of the bureaucracy continually hear that they serve a higher master. Consider this provision of the Constitution that was probably never meant to be more than a nice decoration to the office building of a hardly functioning Parliament:

A public office is a public trust. Public officers and employees shall serve with the highest degree of responsibility, integrity, loyalty and efficiency and shall remain accountable to the people.<sup>5</sup>

This pronouncement, like most nice sayings, is a myth. But it is continually drummed into the heads of civil servants in training programs. It assaults their eyes as they enter their offices. It is recalled to them when they are "civil servants." They are thus constantly reminded of the nobility of their calling.

On the other hand, there is the fact that as thinking, feeling human beings they find some needs met by the organization they work for — the need for work, the need for status, the need to belong, the need for power. And, they also find that it does not answer all of these needs — power is confined to a small decision area; people look down on government employees; it does not even pay enough.

Talking of the modern capitalist state, Habermas claims that legitimacy breaks down when the state cannot deliver on its promises of consumer goods and welfare benefits, when no rewards follow individual effort.<sup>6</sup> This leads to the weakening of the moral fiber of capitalism. Todd follows this up, speaking of modern organizations directly, declaring that the need of subordinates for recognition on the basis of merit is not met because superiors are increasingly incapable of judging the technical merits of work sub-

mitted to them.<sup>7</sup> How is the merit system to work if individual effort cannot even be properly recognized?

This clash of doctrine and fact provides the bases for why choices for action are difficult for civil servants in general.

The authoritarian state raises other problems. My use of the term is closest to the characterization by O'Donnell and Collier of a bureaucratic-authoritarian state which has the following features:

These systems are "excluding" and emphatically non-democratic. Central actors in the dominant coalition include high-level technocrats – military and civilian within and outside the state – working in close association with foreign capital. This new elite eliminates electoral competition and severely controls the political participation of the popular sector. Public policy is centrally concerned with promoting advanced industrialization.<sup>8</sup>

Further, it is operating within a society in which local capitalists collaborate with multinationals not only to advance commerce and industry but also to weaken the traditional dominance of landlords. This expansion necessitates the depression of wages – arousing the working class – and breaks capitalists outside the faction, thus raising nationalistic sentiments.<sup>9</sup> This situation raises at least three other important problems for the civil servants.

First, the sovereign does not have the link with the people and is not subject to their rejection or recall. I use "sovereign" here following Gordon Tullock in the sense of the person who is able to reward or punish the reference actor, whom he must please.<sup>10</sup> It is thus the person or group of persons exercising the highest level of power and decision making in a territory. (This is different from Wilson's earlier reference to the people as the sovereign.)

Secondly, the desire and the rhetoric of the sovereign are not congruent. This is a modern state where rulers no longer claim divine right nor consider the poor as not human enough. Rather, you have a sovereign who says:

For whatever we achieve today – whatever we achieve tomorrow – can only mean progress if it transforms the life of the poor. Our task is to see within the shortest possible time the final emancipation of the poor of our country.<sup>11</sup>

And of the bureaucracy specifically: "You are the conscience of the nation as it turns society around."<sup>12</sup> By contrast, one may not agree with Reagan's view of the *contras* as Founding Fathers but he really thinks they are, and the Department of State official who acts on that premise is not going to be in hot water. Not so in this authoritarian state, where a career executive service official who then proceeded to act on behalf of the poor found him-

self purged and disgraced for precisely that action.<sup>13</sup>

The gap between rhetoric and reality extends to a wide variety of issues: protection of communal rights versus the demand of multinationals, civil liberties against defense needs, content of programs against their budgets, etc.

Thirdly, mistakes in interpreting current will can lead to very heavy costs — loss of a job, “deep-freezing,” threats, even direct repression by the goons of the sovereign.

What is the civil servant to do? Organization scholars have identified five general modes of action of civil servants:<sup>14</sup>

*Routinized performance.* Also called “overconformity,” this is the stance of the person who has internalized the politics-administration dichotomy. He thinks of himself as really a humanized robot. He has been trained to apply rules and has mastered what Veblen called “trained incapacity” to see substantive questions and exceptional situations.<sup>15</sup>

*Empire-building.* This is what a person does to enlarge his role in the organization. He builds a coterie of subordinates who fawn over him, and through careful use of organizational resources makes it difficult for clients and other members of the organization to ignore him.

*Technocratic action.* Behaving to further the goals of the present regime, thus the choice is economic over social criteria. Wearing the blinders of the regime, one attempts to find the most efficient and effective performance within its limits, confident that in developing their expertise to the hilt, they are providing the best public service possible.

*Corruption.* This consists of all actions designed to forward private-regarding ends.

*Dissent and committed action.* This involves behavior which are alternatives to current regime priorities and decisions.

The last two are the more interesting of the choices and the ones to which I will pay the greatest attention.

### *Corruption*

In the College of Public Administration, we studied “graft and corruption.” After martial law was declared, we assumed more circumspection and called it “deviant bureaucratic behavior” until we realized that it was

*normal* behavior for a big minority in some offices. We have since called it "negative bureaucratic behavior," reflecting in that name our own judgment of its consequences. But for many years, we limited ourselves to corruption as practised by members of the bureaucracy. However, we soon realized that the biggest corruption escapes this net. For instance, laws which provide monopoly powers to certain firms, or legal agreements which circumvent constitutional limits on the use of land by foreign entities, are unfair. They are unlikely to have been promulgated out of the goodness of one's heart. Rather, some exchange of favors — goodwill in a few cases, monetary in most others — has probably taken place. This practice of what may be called "policy corruption," I wish to include also among the choices persons in the civil service may take.

What is the nature and extent of corruption since the Marcos coup? I have no figures, but our close study of the phenomenon suggests the following:

(1) There has been an increase in the instances of corruption. This is correlated with the increased scope of bureaucracy, due to the increased number of direct interventions as well as regulations of the society and economy. For instance, the number of public enterprises grew from 30 to ten times that between 1960 and 1985. The numbers and kinds of regulatory agencies have also increased. There have also been many more guardians and controllers and thus many more persons to bribe.

(2) At the same time, there appears to be a decrease in the number of persons involved relative to the size of the bureaucracy. This may be due to the presence of very strict laws and their formalistic — even capricious — implementation. Thus, the risks of corruption can be quite high for persons without connections and corruption can then be limited to a privileged group.

There have also been greater availability and increased use of punitive measures, such as summary dismissals and more agencies watching over the bureaucracy (including Constitutional bodies like the Tanodbayan, Sandiganbayan, the Commission on Audit and the Civil Service Commission). While these agencies are not provided with sufficient resources to go after all corruptors, they can mete out heavy punishment for those they are allowed to catch.

(3) With more cures and relatively less persons involved, corruption can be expected to have greater returns and to be centralized and protected. This way, corruption can go to scandalous proportions. The scandal is not limited to the size of the "take" alone but also to the manner by which a person manages to be a beneficiary of the corrupt act. I refer particularly

to cases where government resources are channelled unjustly to certain favored persons who get such a privilege through legal (but perhaps not legitimate) ways, e.g., through presidential decrees providing exemptions, subsidies or monopoly power.<sup>16</sup>

(4) Corruption as discussed above can hardly be a one-shot deal undertaken by the individual bureaucrat himself. Rather, it tends to have a systemic character since it involves an informal organization with power over practically all transactions in the bureaucracy, parallel to and flouting the legitimate rules of the formal organization.

### *Committed Political Action*

Committed political action (CPA) like corruption is a type of debureaucratization in Eisenstadt's terms, being one that brings in values supposedly outside the organization's neutral parameter.<sup>17</sup> In other words, CPA and corruption are both modes of behavior of a politicized civil servant. Corruption uses politics in the negative sense as it allows personal greed and narrow partisan interests to influence administrative decisions. By contrast, the actor of the second mode looks at politics in its noble sense as the search for the public interest and its enhancement.

The roots for committed political action are diverse. One root recalls the p/a dichotomy and the democratic values on which it is based. John Rohr, speaking from the political science-public administration tradition, defines the fundamental ethical problem of civil servants as that of how discretionary power is utilized in a manner consistent with the values of a democratic regime.<sup>18</sup> This is where public administration students usually start.

Then we can look back to Weber's discussion of politics as a vocation, and see in it the need for officials with variegated self-interests to find meaning in their work.

Or we can trace it from the failures of both capitalism and bureaucracy. Habermas points to these. Given the inability of the organization to satisfy the merit principle, civil servants then seek political and moral criteria to make sense of their lifework.

Committed political action may also have religious sources such as extra-organizational involvement in conscientization groups. Or it may be drawn from patriotic sentiments mocked by increased foreign penetration into the economy and their access to resources previously reserved for nationals.



Committed action may also be based on one's experience in the bureaucracy, both positive and negative. On the positive side, the profession of public administration in the Philippines has moved towards "modernization." The Civil Service Commission, the Commission on Audit, the Sandiganbayan (Administrative Court) and the Tanodbayan (Ombudsman) have been made constitutional bodies, supposed to be independent and above the fray of partisan politics. The recent structural overhaul has been termed "organizing for development," characterized by a centripetal move towards closer links with the people. And civil servants have been bombarded by training programs which introduce not just organizational technology but also the means to sensitize them to the needs of the have-not members of society.

On the negative side, they encounter almost daily the gap between rhetoric and practice I have already mentioned above. This gap is not a theoretical issue for civil servants. They are the persons who must engage in deliberate lying or distortion of facts, often against the technical criteria they are so well trained in.<sup>19</sup> An example is the change of indices on wages, employment, malnutrition, purchasing power, and population increase. They are also asked to participate in making and implementing rules which do not follow the spirit of the main policy (minorities and reforestation, loaning policies for the poor and very high cutoff points, incentives for business reserved for cronies).<sup>20</sup> In addition, they are exposed to hazards emanating from a loose definition of subversion, particularly in the countryside, where physicians, nurses, and other government workers are increasingly subject to terrorism and threats from their military counterparts.<sup>21</sup> They also see an increasingly strong anti-corruption body of laws vitiated by favoritism and market exchanges in high places, wasteful expenditures and disregard for human life. They are also given memoranda extolling the neutrality of the civil service in the same seminars where they are told whom to vote for or else. . .<sup>22</sup>

How is committed action manifested? I must mention first the movement for a national ideology which officially began in 1982 and which was accelerated after the Aquino assassination. Bits and pieces of the Marcosian theory of government — particularly his idea of revolution from the center and the pitch toward attainment of economic equality before enjoyment of political freedoms — have been preached in the Development Academy of the Philippines (DAP) and other training programs since the start of martial law. But it was only after the 1980s that a concerted effort to enlist civil servants into an ideology movement was seriously tackled. Inevitably, it ran into factional rivalries among the Marcos ideologues and is now probably moribund. Its most attractive propaganda line is that it is better than communism and can be attained without a revolution, so that one may as well make the current regime work. There was also an element of compulsion

in the attendance to this ideology seminars that results in inflating government claims of support. But despite my own misgivings about the movement, it did attract a number of serious, conscientious, nationalistic civil servants who wanted to make sense of their lifework. It was manageable and uplifting as long as they did not face contradictions directly in their work. But when they did, even converted ideologues tried to use the following atomized strategies:

(1) *Personal sacrifice.* Further the goals of society by working "above and beyond the call of duty." Pay for some official needs, work beyond hours, engage in devoted service.

(2) *Brinkmanship.* Do as much as may be allowed, without putting oneself in any position of sacrifice. The system is slack and inefficient. This includes joking as a mechanism of adjustment, not following guidelines about, for instance, how to vote, writing internal memos dissenting against policies, writing memos which seem to run against prevailing policies, exposing the spy of the military in one's agency.

(3) *Distancing oneself from the regime.* There are a few who have resigned from the service to be in the private sector where they are not forced to defend the regime. Others distance themselves only psychologically, by refusing to get involved in political discussions where, as an employee of government, they may be misconstrued as its spokespersons.

(4) *Open dissent.* Here, the civil servant engages in criticisms and similar discussions of what he considers misguided policies or their misleading or wrong implementation. He may even smuggle out examples of such program distortions to the press. And he may participate in boycotts and rallies sponsored by anti-Marcos organizations.

These are the acts of persons coping individually. It is ironic that when one overconforms, he can rely on the standard operating procedures of the formal organization to back him up. The empire builder creates his own structure to push through his private-regarding activities forward. The corruptors have established within an existing organization a rival structure that parallels the processes and grabs the power of the bureaucracy in their quest for extra income and more power for themselves. The technocrats can rely on the system they are perpetuating.

But those who may be considered politicized for larger public ends are not organized, and tend to engage in random and accidental approaches. When not thwarted by the regime, their actions serve to manifest dissent and resistance from within the bureaucratic apparatus itself.

Why have the civil servants attempting to be people-responsive not bonded together to make their collective views heard? Partly this is because of the slack system already mentioned which makes dissent possible without making one very conspicuous. Partly this is because many policies on paper are pro-people, and if one implements its spirit quietly, he or she can live with his or her conscience without facing direct conflict with the regime. This includes programs such as primary health care of the Ministry of Health, the assistance to sugar workers of the Ministry of Labor and Employment and various programs of the Ministry of Agrarian Reform. A third reason for proceeding without an organization is that it courts harassment and danger that single individuals (because they are more vulnerable) do not wish to bring upon themselves.

In one respect, the lack of organization is desirable. When the bureaucrats act even according to their highest values in rendering service to the people, they serve to strengthen the organization's control over the masses. This becomes a form of increased technocratic dominance (ruling over the masses, interpreting what is best for them). While these specific civil servants distance themselves from this technocracy, they may be sowing seeds for another type of domination over the people after Marcos.

What is needed I think is increased organized commitment on the part of civil servants but in conjunction with the extension of effective power to those below. This democratization cannot be a civil service phenomenon alone. There are examples of these in certain areas of the country where militant villagers and responsive civil servants work together to meet the demands of the poor. However, this has occurred in only a few areas, and the groups have become suspect since. Perhaps this kind of commitment is not possible on a large scale in a non-revolutionary situation?

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Woodrow Wilson, "The Study of Administration," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 2 (June 1887), pp. 197-222; reprinted in abridged form in Dwight Waldo, ed., *Ideas and Issues in Public Administration: A Book of Readings* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1953), pp. 65-66.

<sup>2</sup>Max Weber, "The Bureaucracy," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958).

<sup>3</sup>Irving Zeitlin, *Marxism: A Re-Examination* (Princeton, N.J.: D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., 1967).

<sup>4</sup>Weber, *op. cit.*

<sup>5</sup>Constitution of the Philippines, 1973, Article XIII, Section 1.

<sup>6</sup>Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. T. McCarthy (London: Heene Mann Press, 1976) pp. 75-95.

<sup>7</sup>Jennifer Todd, "The Politics of the Public Service: Some Implications of Recent Theories of the State for the Analysis of Administrative Systems," *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. X (1982), pp. 353-356.

<sup>8</sup>David Collier, "Overview of the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian Model," in Collier, ed., *The New Authoritarianism in Latin America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 24.

<sup>9</sup>Berch Berberoglu, "The Class Nature of the State in Peripheral Social Formations," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (1983), pp. 328-330.

<sup>10</sup>Gordon Tullock, *The Politics of Bureaucracy* (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1965), p. 51.

<sup>11</sup>Ferdinand E. Marcos, Speech on the Opening of the Interim Batasang Pambansa (National Assembly), June 12, 1978.

<sup>12</sup>From the collection of sayings of Ferdinand E. Marcos, published by the Philippine Army Civil Relations and Information Service (PACRIS), 1976.

<sup>13</sup>The person was reinstated after a long investigation but was frozen in his position for some time. His case is described in Ledivina V. Carino, "Personnel Policies and Bureaucratic Behavior under Martial Law," *Philippine Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. XXI, Nos. 3 & 4 (July-October 1977), p. 314.

<sup>14</sup>R. Bar Yosef and E.O. Schild, "Pressures and Defenses in Bureaucratic Roles," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. LXXI (1980), p. 665-673.

<sup>15</sup>Thorstein Veblen, *The Instinct of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts* (New York: Norton, 1941).

<sup>16</sup>Due to the nature of this problem, documentary evidence is difficult to present. However, policy corruption can be inferred from various transactions. See for instance Victoria A. Bautista, "The Nature, Causes and Extent of Corruption: A Review of the Literature," *Philippine Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. XXVI, Nos. 3 & 4 (July-October 1982), pp. 235-270.

<sup>17</sup>S.N. Eisenstadt, *Essays on Comparative Institutions*. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1965), p. 278.

<sup>18</sup>John Rohr, "Professional Ethics," in T.D. Lynch, ed., *Public Administration and Public Policy* (Special Issue on Organization Theory and Management), Vol. XX (1983), pp. 217-248.

<sup>19</sup>For instance, the use of legislated minimum wages instead of actual income received to describe the labor situation, the liberalizing of the meaning of "employment" to include fewer hours of work and backyard gardens, the inclusion of foreign debts among the country's export receipts (which allowed it to incur obligations beyond its ability to pay), among many other similar distortions. These are regularly unmasked in such publications as *Ibon Facts and Figures*, Manila 1978 to date.

<sup>20</sup>This is well-analyzed in Roman Dubsy, "Development and Technocratic Thought in the Philippines," unpublished doctoral dissertation submitted to the University of the Philippines, 1981; see also Ana Marie Agulto, "The KKK: Its Social Justice Implications and Administrative Capability," *Philippine Journal of Public Administration*, Manila, Vol. 27 (October 1983), pp. 372-411. The KKK is a loaning program supposedly for the poorest of the poor.

<sup>21</sup>Amanda Valenzuela, ed., *The Administration of Health Services: Focus on Primary Health Care* (Diliman, Q.C.: UP Management and Education Council, 1982).

<sup>22</sup>Luzviminda Tancango, "Bureaucracy and Democracy in the Philippines: A Historical Analysis of the Notion and Practice of Political Neutrality of the Civil Service," paper presented at the EROPA Regional Conference on Comparative Study of Electoral Systems in Asia and the Pacific held at the Philippine Social Science Council Auditorium, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines on February 2-6, 1986.