

POLITICAL PREREQUISITE FOR AN EFFECTIVE ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM IN A TRANSITIONAL SOCIETY

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The purpose of this paper is to formulate a significant hypothesis to explain the failure of various attempts for effective administrative reforms in countries that are in a critical stage of political and economic development. This formulation is mostly based on a rough analysis and experience in the Turkish context and although the uniqueness of each country's circumstances cannot be denied, the same conclusions may serve to explain other similar situations.

Administrative reforms, whether taken to indicate a comprehensive and thorough improvement of the structures and human resources of a country's public administration or used as exaggerated labels for minor readjustments in various separate fields of governmental action, are often considered as isolated phenomena detached from the political context. This attitude is strongly influenced by the opinions of most foreign technical assistance «experts» who make a point of their «neutrality» by minimizing the significance of the «political» element at least in appearance, leaving its «reforming» to other ways of foreign action.

Other well-established concepts contribute to this situation. Paramount among these is the belief that administrative reform is a continual process to be perpetuated by the administration itself: «an effective administrative reform is the one which relies on continuous action for improvement from within the administrative agencies» is the key sentence of most chapters on this subject in classical textbooks.

In many cases, this impression is further strengthened by the fact that the desire for reform seems to be first formulated and

put forth by the administrators themselves : they are the first to point to the necessity of changing the old procedures, to establish new structures and to create modern personnel practices. However, one is often puzzled by the inability of the same administrators to bring about a significant reform action in their own agency or in the administration as a whole.

Slogans and failures

Administrative reform seems to be an ever-present slogan of modern life. From the poorest to the richest nations of the world, the public, the government, political parties and civil servants all demand it as a necessity. Motives can be different (improving the services received by the citizens; reducing the cost of government operations, therefore the financial load to the taxpayers; creating an effective machinery for the implementation of specific party policies, etc.), but the wish for improvement is almost universal. Why then most attempts for administrative reforms die off at their initial stage or linger for years and become indiscernable from other bureaucratic activities ?

This has been the case of administrative reform in Turkey. The need to improve the administrative machinery was generally accepted even before the change of power in May 1960, but it then gained impetus with the fresh drive to reorganize the structures of the Republic and with the initial efforts to elaborate a new constitution. In the newly created State Planning Organization, the Section of Coordination was given the additional task of recommending legal and administrative measures to eliminate the various obstacles that stood on the way to a swift implementation of development plans. On the other hand, a State Personnel Department was established primarily for drafting legislation to improve the status and pay of the civil service. Moreover, soon after the general elections of October 1961, the Council of Ministers created a special committee composed of higher civil servants, planners and university members to make recommendations for the reorganization of central government services. In short, most of the conceivable institutional devices were established to launch a comprehensive movement for administrative reform.

But results fell quite short of expectations. True, the Coordination Section of the State Planning Organization did make certain suggestions, especially on budgetary procedures, that were put into effect, the State Personnel Department did draft a reform law

that was even voted by the Parliament albeit with the primary concern for increasing the general (therefore, parliamentary) salary scale and the Committee for Central Government Reorganization did produce a lengthy report on the redistribution and reorganization of central government functions.¹ But it is also true that, as years went by, the State Planning Organization lost its effectiveness as an instrument for coordinating government activities, the personnel reform act proved to have been so vaguely drafted that its implementation was stopped pending further research and finally the recommendations of a «second committee» on the application of the Central Reorganization Committee's recommendations still remain in the files.

The fallacy of «impartial bureaucrats»

Various devices are used in countries attempting an overall administrative reform: a special ministry for this purpose, temporary or permanent committees, a central government agency, existing organizations for budget control or O and M units.² Whatever the institutional formula, the essential element of any comprehensive administrative reorganization seems to be a genuine «political» desire to reform the administration. Since almost all party platforms or cabinet programmes include paragraphs on the urgency of reforming the administrative structure and personnel, this prerequisite may at first seem to be met everywhere. But a closer look at realities will show that, even in cases where a special ministry appears to have been created for administrative reform purposes, effective action towards this goal is delayed because of certain political factors related to the country's socio-economic development and in particular to the power balance between various classes and groups in a given period of transition.

Of course, the idea of an impartial bureaucracy at the service of governments in power, irrespective of their political ideologies,

¹ The Report has also been published in English: **Organization and Functions of the Central Government of Turkey** (Report of the Managing Board of the Central Government Organization Research Project). A publication of the Institute of Public Administration for Turkey and the Middle East, Ankara, 1965.

² For a full discussion of administrative reform procedures, see Bernard Gournay, **Introduction à la Science administrative: Les administrations publiques dans les sociétés contemporaines**, Cahiers de la Fondation nationale des Sciences politiques, Paris, Librairie Armand Colin, 1966, pp. 293-301.

has long been proved to be a fallacy.³ Studies on the development process of many countries have further demonstrated that, for long periods of transition from one culture to another, bureaucracies may even acquire a well-established power of their own because of their leading rôle in modernization. Taking this fact into consideration, some political scientists have even viewed the established power of the bureaucracy as an obstacle to «political» development and, to overcome it, have suggested certain amazing solutions such as the introduction of spoils system to foster party politics and the breaking down of large economic development projects to promote local government!⁴

Transitional situations and the climate for reform

The position of an established bureaucracy becomes quite interesting when economic and social development begins to create new sources of influence within the polity. In such transitional situations, a new bourgeoisie may emerge as the result of continuous efforts to encourage commerce and industry and it may demand a share, if not a supremacy, in the conduct of the nation's affairs. In its search to establish a balance against bureaucratic power, this new class may even collaborate with the remnants of the disintegrating feudal structures in the country.

This is in short the history of political development in Turkey, especially during the last twenty years. And the present constitutional order represents in fact a «truce» whereby political power, emanating from universal suffrage but reflecting mainly the new and old non-bureaucratic spheres of influence, agrees to abide by the rules protecting the values of a bureaucratic elite, partly militarized or politicized, which has led the nation since the reforms of the 19th century.

Now, such a situation of power balance in a society seems to create an unfavourable climate for effective administrative reforms. The political power faces a dilemma: on the one hand it has to meet the aspirations of the masses, often through government ac-

³ For a vilifying description of a so-called «impartial» civil service defending in fact the values of the established class interests, see: H. J. Laski, **Reflections on the Constitution: The House of Commons, The Cabinet, The Civil Service**. Manchester University Press, 1951, pp. 161-212.

⁴ For these and other views on the relationship between bureaucratic power and political development, see: Joseph LaPalombara (edit.), **Bureaucracy and Political Development**. Princeton N. J., Princeton University Press, 1963, especially pp. 128-131 (Fred W. Riggs, «Bureaucrats and Political Development») and p. 30 (Joseph LaPolombara, «An Overview of Bureaucracy and Political Development»).

tion by an efficient administrative machinery, but on the other hand the creation of a «better» civil service, by way of a merit system as most reformers recommend it, would obviously lead to restrengthen a recently subdued bureaucratic element. Therefore, most administrative reforms, if ever undertaken in similar situations, would tend to put the emphasis on a quasi-mechanical rearrangement of the services, a streamlined administrative structure, in short on the technical aspects of the administrative machinery. The improvement of the human element, its recreation on the basis of merit, equal pay for equal work, fair promotion, etc. would tend to be neglected for fear of reinforcing the other hand of the balance. Most probably, the personnel policy would be geared to such practices as «concealed spoils system» whereby groups more inclined to avoid clashes with the newly emerging political power would be compensated by way of bonuses, partial pay increases, easier conditions of work, etc., instead of an overall administrative reform.

On the other hand, those bureaucrats who feel most the need for a comprehensive reform and even have concrete plans for improving structures, procedures *and* personnel find themselves in a deadlock: most of what they plan to do requires legislative action, at least at the initial stage of breaking the vicious circle of the existent legal barriers and obtaining delegated powers. This brings the problem back to the reluctance for essential reform on the part of the political power in this given circumstance.

In addition, the plans of these reform-minded bureaucrats are hampered by those elements of the bureaucracy already benefiting from the disruption brought by partial arrangements in the system. Thus, drafts linger from committee to committee, become a matter of «bureaucratic politics» between various groups of civil servants, each striving to conserve its acquisitions and standing on the way to an overall improvement.

This deadlock cannot of course last indefinitely. As the bureaucracy loses its position in the balance of power and other forces such as an organized working class enter the national political scene hitherto dominated by the bourgeoisie and its allies, thus creating a new pattern of power distribution within the polity, then a more favourable climate is created for administrative reform. When the bureaucratic element is reduced to a limited and subdued role, a comprehensive and effective improvement in the administrative structure and personnel no longer means a real and immediate threat to the supremacy of the political power.