
UNIT.7. CRITIQUE OF BUREAUCRACY

Structure

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7.0. LEARNING OUTCOMES

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- understand the criticism of early writers on bureaucracy
- know the Weberian concept and criticism of bureaucracy
- know the Marxist criticism of bureaucracy
- understand the inevitability of bureaucracy in spite of criticism

7.1. INTRODUCTION

Bureaucracy as a phenomena or concept is not the product of twentieth century and existed in a rudimentary form in earlier period in different countries of the world. In some of the countries its origin and history was traced to B.C. e.g. China and India. It was believed that way back in 186 B.C. in China the public offices were recruited through competitive examination and the bureaucratic system was in place. It was Vincent de Gourney swho first used the term 'bureaumania' to describe the form of a government that existed in the first half of eighteenth century in France. He used to be a strong critic of it and often felt that the officer, clerks, secretaries and inspectors though exist for the public good or interest but in practice they used to create that public interest for their own existence. Since then many political scientists and sociologists have critically examined the bureaucracy, its mechanism, irrespective of any political system in which the bureaucracy functions. Many times the term bureaucracy is synonymously used for the government also. Criticism on bureaucracy is as old as the government system itself.

7.2. BUREAUCRACY: EARLY CRITICS

Though Vincent de Gourney was responsible for using the word 'bureaucracy' for the first time, but the credit for popularising the word in French goes to Balzac through his novels. While describing it as an organised one with mediocratic background and felt it "as fussy and meddlesome, in short, as a small shopkeeper's wife" (Albrow, p.18)

In the year 1792 Humboldt expressed the fear that the increase in the state authority will facilitate the growth of the administration and the state start functioning in a mechanical manner and transforming the men as machines. The fears of Humboldt's were reflected by Freiherr vom Stein in 1821 who felt that the then Prussia was 'ruled by buralists – salaried, with a knowledge of books, with no cause of support, and without property.....'. Stein described them as "lifeless governmental machines' who draw their salaries from the exchequer and write, write, write, in silence, in offices behind closed doors, unknown, unnoticed, unparsed, and they bring up their children to be equally usable writing machines". (Albrow, p.19). The ideas expressed by early writers on bureaucracy made the people to imagine the bureaucracy as a form of government where power is in the hands of officials; with a collective designation. Many English writers and critics have expressed their views on bureaucracy during 18th century. Carlyle commented in 1850 about bureaucracy as 'the continental nuisance'. In order to regulate or control the bureaucracy more and more bureaucratic machinery was created as a remedy to the existing one.

J. S. Mill

John Stuart Mill in 1848 felt that the bureaucracy as the main reason for inferior political life (Albrow, p.22). J. S. Mill who expressed his ideas on bureaucracy in his book "On Liberty" (1850), felt that in the name of administrative offices, the bureaucracy monopolises the talent of the nation, the youth would develop the idea of getting admitted in to it as the major ambition in life. He further felt that both the governors and the governed become the slaves of bureaucracy and the

reforming would be impossible and nothing against the will of it would be ever done (Albrow, p.22).

While elaborating his ideas on representative government, Mill expressed the view that bureaucracy “accumulates experience, acquires with trained and well-considered traditional maxim, and makes provisions for appropriate practical knowledge in those who have the actual conduct of affairs” (Albrow, p.22). Mill felt that the bureaucracy die its natural death because of its rigid adherence to maxims and only the representative nature of the governments would allow the creative people to take over from the mediocrity who run the affairs of the government.

Mosca and Michels

Mosca and Michels are very important thinkers who gave thrust to the concept of the bureaucracy and analysed it in a new angle of oligarchic rule by the few salaried employees. Their views have widened the scope of the concept of bureaucracy, which propelled Max Weber to study bureaucracy in a sociological context.

The ideas of Mosca on the concept of bureaucracy were appeared in his classic work called “The Ruling Class” (1895). He described how a numerically minority will participate in the government and emerge as a ruling class to which majority of the public will submit. Mosca classified government in to two types, the feudal and the bureaucratic. In a feudal state the ruling class operates a simple structure and the members exercise multi-farious functions in the areas of economy, judicial, administrative or military domains. They exercise their

authority directly on the ruled class. In the bureaucratic state the functions are clearly demarcated among the ruling class through its bureaucracy. They were paid salaries for doing their work from the national wealth. Mosca stated the inevitability of minority rule, which negates the principle of democracy. The public officials were not only seen as a part of ruling class but also they form a part of defining characteristic of modern state. The ruling class reflects the variety of interest and talents of the society. Mosca believed that the elected parliaments might not exercise control over the bureaucracy and suggest the involvement of wealthy public and respectable hard working people directly in the administration. For Mosca bureaucracy is a complex body of public officials who were paid salaries by the nation. Over the years the bureaucrats gain specialisation and centralise the power among the few ruling class.

Michels's book on "Political Parties" (1911) further elaborated Mosca's views on bureaucracy. The ideas of Mosca and Michels have lot of similarities. Michels believed that bureaucracy was a necessity in the modern state. The politically dominant class determines the bureaucracy while the politically insecure middle class seeks security in the government employment. This is how both groups reciprocate and support each other for their existence. While analysing the role of political parties Michels felt that like the governments, big political parties also recruit full-time salaried officials to look after the organisational activities and to run it on professional lines. These officials over a period of time emerge as the specialist in the operational aspects of the political parties and occupy the leadership positions in the bureaucracy. Michels feel that any large-scale organisation needs salaried people to run its activities in the modern world. Thus expanding the role of bureaucracy to other organisations.

Like Mosca, Michels also suggested different ways through which the powers of bureaucracy can be limited which include, referenda, syndicalism and anarchism. At the end Michels concluded that it is difficult to withstand the rule of oligarchy.

Others

The other important thinker who expressed his views on bureaucracy was Walter Bagehot. Bagehot is against the American system of administration which works on the lines of party in power and appreciated the English administration which in spite of regular change of ministers, the bureaucracy was never allowed to sink routinely and in fact the new men who occupied the position responded to the public opinion and enriched the administrative process. Ramsay Muir felt that the permanent officials of England had left lasting influence on the bureaucracy.

Gustav Schmoller, the German social scientist who edited the history of Prussian administrative system and gave many lectures on German officialdom felt that every society consists of three components: a leader, his staff and the masses. While commenting upon the leader's staff Schmoller stated that there are four stages of its development. The first one is primitive stage wherein it is difficult to notice the differences among the offices and the roles of the people in the community. In the second one the administrative offices were recruited hereditarily like feudal societies. In the third category the offices were filled either through drawing of lots or election for a shorter duration. The entry to second and third categories was restricted to propertied ruling aristocracy. The fourth stage of leaders staff development was based on career structure with life-long, salaried hierarchic professional job. Schmoller felt the fourth form of

bureaucratic development of leader's staff is inevitable in the modern state. Though Schmoller was criticised for failing to recognise the dangers of bureaucracy, but his contribution helped to recast and refine the concept of bureaucracy.

The bureaucracy that prevailed during nineteenth century England and Germany has a many contradictions between them. These differences were brought in to lime light by Lorenz von Stein. The German system based on the concept of 'collegium' a body of officials charged with the responsibility of advising the rulers and taking responsibility for its actions. It takes decision after a thorough discussion at different levels, which in fact delays the decision making process of the collective 'collegium'. The English bureaucratic system depends mostly on individual responsibility and drafting and noting of the entire decision making process wherein the fixing of accountability is ensured. (Albrow, p. 27)

Irrespective of the bureaucratic system, either German or English, in place it has the tendency of ever expanding its functions and activities and multiplying its numbers. As bureaucracy executes its activities through pen, which were used to be implemented with the word of mouth earlier. It means more pens are put into use resulting the expansion of bureaucracy and taking up of new activities, which were earlier used to be in the citizens domain. This has resulted in amorphous growth of public bureaucracy and acquisition of power over the citizens. (Albrow, p.28)

The expanding role of bureaucracy over its citizens and the offences committed against the public were drawn the attention of the Polish lawyer Josef Olszewski in 1904. While commenting about the French bureaucracy the social scientist

Frederic Le Play stated that the bureaucracy is basically located in the few middle ranking officials who complicate the bureaucracy with elaborate details and suppress the public initiative (Albrow, p.30)

The important themes that emerged from the writing of nineteenth century writers can be classified in to three groups depending on the way they looked at the bureaucracy. The first group viewed bureaucracy as a form of government irrespective of political system like monarchy, democracy or aristocracy. They are led by Vincent de Gourney and Mill. The second group viewed bureaucracy as a collegium of administrators supported by German writers like Heinzen and others. The third group has brought out the discontent of the public against the officialdom consisting of paid permanent civil servants led by Olszewski and Le play.

The study of bureaucracy was neglected during the twentieth century. However it saw the maximum debate during the same time by eminent thinkers. The debates revolved around two opposite view points. The first one is – bureaucracy as a tool of efficiency and the second one is bureaucracy which leads to administrative inefficiency, have dominated the later theory of bureaucracy. The politico-social thinkers from Mill, Mosca, Michels, to Weber and Marx viewed bureaucracy with their established political notions in mind and elaborated upon their point of views on bureaucracy. It is needless to say that the exercise of power determines the relations in the society. One group of people thinks that those who hold power and justified its exercise through religious-secular and meta physical means. They used to believe that they are exercising power for God or society and the public officials used to share the purpose. The other group

believes that the power was the net result of groups economic place in the society and believes that the officials are the agents representing economic interest groups in term the dominant class.

The bureaucrat often viewed as a paid servant of the government. In practice the paradoxical development has taken place. The person who has employed as a paid servant has started acting as a centre of power and his position is not derived from the society but his position came from the power he holds in government. Many proponents of the bureaucracy in the beginning did not anticipate it. However the later thinkers have deliberated at a greater length on the power of the bureaucrat in the government and society.

7.3. BUREAUCRACY: WEBERIAN PARIDIGM

Max Weber's contribution to the study of bureaucracy is unparallel in the history. He studied bureaucracy in a systematic manner. He explained the features of legal-rational bureaucracy and the features of the officials who form very important component of the bureaucracy. Though his ideas on bureaucracy are discussed threadbare in the previous unit, considering his contribution to the study of bureaucracy and the criticism it attracted from the cross section of the scholars is explained in this section.

7.3.1. Max Weber's Ideas

In spite of the fact that there was a considerable amount of discussion on bureaucracy by the early writers, Weber's contribution to the theory of bureaucracy is more systematic and organised. Weber provided a framework for understanding of bureaucracy. He considered it as the legal-rational model of authority, which is based on impersonality, rule of law, strict hierarchy, written documentation and separation of public office from the private. He viewed bureaucracy as the most positive instrument. He considered the bureaucracy as the most efficient form of organisation. Precision, continuity, discipline, reliability are the important characteristics of Weberian bureaucracy. These characteristics made it technically the most superior and satisfactory form of organisation.

Irrespective of type of organisation, this kind of bureaucracy is essential for their efficient functioning. Weber considered that the society once ruled by bureaucracy can never think of any alternative. Weber was also conscious that the monocratic bureaucracy has the inherent tendency of accumulating power because of its specialised knowledge of the administrative office. Hence, Weber considered certain mechanisms to limit the authority of the bureaucracy. They are: collegiality, separation of powers, amateur administration, direct democracy and representation. (The detailed explanation was given in the previous unit).

7.3.2. Critics of Weberian Bureaucracy

While questioning the Weber's rational bureaucracy, Robert Marten expressed the view that too much emphasis on precision, reliability and rules may be self-

defeating. Graded career structure may encourage the bureaucrats to develop a group solidarity, which may oppose any structural changes and reforms in the bureaucracy. This may lead to the development of vested interest by the bureaucracy contrary to the objectives or interest of the organisation.

In this connection it is not out of context to know what Philip Selznick stated about the functioning of the sub-units of the organisation or administration. He felt that the purpose or objectives of the organisation get defeated if the sub-units set up individual goals for themselves and function contrary to the goals of the broader organisational or administrative structure. He suggests the remedy for this is better coordination not setting up of new departments.

While criticizing Weber for his neglect of humane characteristics of bureaucracy in its functioning both Merton and Selznick stated that the interest, prejudices and fears of bureaucrats will influence their functioning as they are members of other self interest groups also.

Talcott Parsons who translated and edited some of the works of Weber felt that Weber has failed to recognise the individual differences between the persons who exercise authority to issue orders and the professional skills. He means to say that the person in high position may not always have the professional skill confusing the member to whom they should obey, the orders of the person who has authority to issue orders or the person who has greater expertise and professional skills.

Alvin Gouldner distinguished two types of bureaucracies and analysed why people comply with the bureaucracy and its bases. In the punishment-centered bureaucracy, the members of the organisation obey the orders reluctantly because the rules are imposed by a foreign group. In the representative bureaucracy, the member of the organisation considers and comply the rules as necessary in their own interest. Gouldner has brought to the forefront the (type of bureaucracy) bases for complying the bureaucracy is the type of bureaucracy. It means people comply representative bureaucracy and disobey the punishment-centered bureaucracy.

R. G. Francis and R. C. Stone in their book “Service and Procedure in Bureaucracy” (1956) felt that though bureaucracy of an organisation is expected to function impersonally and adherence to rules but in practice, they adapt their action as per the circumstances and needs of the individuals in the organisation. It means the bureaucracy may not always act impersonally as it favours some in execution of its rules and regulations. Rudolf Smend expressed the opinion that even the judicial system is not over board in delivering the justice. It has prompted the socialist to complain that even their judicial system delivers the bourgeois justice.

Though Weber felt that bureaucracy is rational in form he ignored the cultural limitations of administrative rationality in the organisational functioning. Reinhard Bendix expressed that the established rules and human experiences are very essential in understanding the efficiency of any organisation. He focused that culture imposes limitations on the administrative rationality of the bureaucracy. There are many cultural values which are outside the perview of the administration but continue to influence the administration in its functioning.

These aspects are not given due importance in the Weberian concept of bureaucracy.

Peter Blau examined issue of how formal regulations were implemented by the rational bureaucracy in achieving the objectives of the organisation in the United States of America. He examined two departments. He found that a group of officials who cooperated and consulted each other have achieved the organisational objectives better than those who followed the rules and regulations. Blau felt that bureaucratic efficiency can not be achieved by the official by strictly adhering to the rigid rules. It means the bureaucrats need to identify with the objectives of the organisation as a whole and adopt his behavior to the changing circumstances to facilitate the efficient administration, which can achieve the objectives of the organisation.

Non-suitability of Weberian model of administration to different circumstances of non-western societies have been brought to limelight by many thinkers. It is also to be kept in mind that the demands of poor and vulnerable and sick need a pro-active bureaucracy not the rational bureaucracy of Weber. R. V. Prethus noted that the implicit assumptions about the human motivation of which Weber has imagined may not be found in the non-western societies. It means the Weberian bureaucracy is not valid in the context of developing countries. This type of opinion was expressed by other social scientists also. The prominent among them are W. Delaney and Joseph La Palombara. Delaney suggested patrimonial administration where as La Palombara felt that Russian or Chinese model of administration may be more effective for the developing countries than the Weberian and western models of administration.

Herbert Simon, in his classic on administrative science “Administrative Behavior” (1945), maintained that variety of circumstances need varied bureaucratic structures and the so called timeless principles of Weberian model of administration cannot suit to the ever changing circumstances of today’s modern world. The theories should always strive for refinement of concepts and principles so that the administrative system in a changing world can be explained better.

7.4. BUREAUCRACY: MARXIAN PARIDIGM

Karl Marx is the one of the greatest thinkers of the modern social sciences who is responsible for the development of Marxian philosophy, which has a lasting impact on the every walk of life of the human beings. His ideals have influenced every aspect of society and human beings. His ideas on bureaucracy have special relevance to understand the role of the bureaucracy in the hands of the ruling elite and his ideas in dismantling it are worth considering. The views of later Marxists like Lenin and Stalin are also included in this section.

7.4.1. Karl Marx Ideas

Marx has not written explicitly on bureaucracy. But he has dealt with it in his several writings. “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right” (1844), “The German Ideology”, “Civil War in France” and in some other writings Marx expressed his views on bureaucracy. Marx examined bureaucracy and its role in the capitalist

system. He considered bureaucracy a part of state mechanism. He attacked the so called characteristics of bureaucracy such as superior knowledge, merit principle, rule mindedness, impartiality etc. He says that the bureaucracy is “the imaginary state of the real state. It is the spiritualism of the state. As a result every thing has double meaning, one real and one bureaucratic, just as knowledge is double one real and one bureaucratic. The bureaucracy has the being of the state, the spiritual being of the society, in its possession it is its private property” (KASPA, p.10). It functions like a private property of the state authority.

According to Marx “the general spirit of bureaucracy is secrecy, mystery, preserved inwardly by means of hierarchy and externally as a close corporation” (KASPA, p.10). Marx further says “the hierarchy of the bureaucracy is hierarchy of knowledge. The highest point entrusts the understanding of particular to the lower echelons, where as these, on the other hand, credit the highest with the understanding in regard to the universal and thus they deceive one another” (KASPA, p.10).

According to Marx “the bureaucracy is the state formation of the civil society. It is state’s consciousness, the state’s will, the state’s power as corporation” (KASPA, p.19). In the name of universal interest the bureaucracy protects the interest of the particular. “The bureaucracy must thus defend the imaginary universality of the particular interest, i.e. the corporation mind, in order to defend the imaginary particularity of universal interest, i.e., its own mind” (KASPA, p.9).

“Being state’s consciousness, will, and power as a corporation, the bureaucracy is thus a particular, closed society with in the state” (KASPA, p.9). “The real end of

the state appears to be the bureaucracy as an end opposed to the state. The mind of bureaucracy is the formal mind of the state. Therefore it makes the formal mind of the state. The bureaucracy asserts itself to be the final end of the state. Because the bureaucracy makes its formal aims its content, it comes into conflict everywhere with the real aims. Hence it is obliged to present what is formal for the content and the content what is formal. The aims of the state are transformed into aims of the bureaus or the aims of the bureaus into the aims of the state” (KASPA, p.10). The above observations of Marx reveal that the bureaucracy protects the interest of the state and the class interest of the state. Bureaucracy is considered as a negative instrument in the process of social transformation. For Marx abolition of state will be achieved institutionally by the destruction of bureaucratic apparatus.

7.4.2. Lenin and Stalin

As Marx could not provide clear ideological frame work to reform or remove the bourgeois bureaucracy the later Marxist like Lenin faced very many difficulties. They, at the beginning did not have any guidance on how a revolutionary party can organise a socialist stand and the socialist state has to depend on the bourgeois bureaucracy to build a socialist society. Lenin took the responsibility to explain how the bureaucracy can be dismantled or reformed to suit the requirements of social democracy. Lenin insisted for regulation and discipline has no takers among his followers. Rosa Luxemburg went to the extent of criticising Lenin for enslaving the labour moment to the bureaucracy. Karl Kautsky suggested to accept the inevitability of bureaucracy and to reorganise it in the interest of workers.

Lenin answered his critics and espoused his views on bureaucracy in his book on “The State and the Revolution” (1947), wherein he expressed the need to dismantle the old state bureaucracy and advocated for the rule of the proletariat with strong central control till the withering away of the state. He advocated for continuation of representative institutions. There would be officials, he stated, but not bureaucrats, which means, “privileged persons divorced from the people and standing *above* the people. That is the essence of bureaucracy” (Albrow, p.73). In reality what Lenin visualised is not the bureaucracy but a proletarian administrative apparatus (Albrow, p.74). Lenin conceded during Eleventh party congress that the old bureaucratic apparatus could not be removed. While accepting the continuation of pre-revolutionary bureaucracy, Stalin expressed the doubt that the Party may loose control of the state apparatus. During Sixteenth Congress of the Communist Party in 1930 Stalin accepted that there could be a new communist bureaucrat who could work against the interest of working class and promised to “cleanse the apparatus” (Albrow, p.75).

The commitments of leader after leader could not make much headway in smashing the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. Trotsky who wished for dismantling of bureaucracy had a difference of opinion with Lenin and Stalin, felt in “The Revolution Betrayed” (1937) that instead of smashing of bureaucracy in the Soviet Union he noticed the emergence of a “privileged and commanding stratum in the Soviet Union, the bureaucracy” (Albrow, p.76). In spite of theoretical commitment to dismantle the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union, the bureaucracy continued as a new class and appropriated the surplus produced by the working class. It thrived there on even in the socialist societies. It all reveals

that bureaucracy as an inevitable institution survived in every type of system- capitalist and socialist and democratic.

7.5. CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that bureaucracy is one of the oldest surviving institutions in the world. It attracted the attention of the scholars of different periods from Mill, Mosca, Michels, Marx to Weber. Mills, Mosca and Michels have highlighted the dysfunctionalities of the bureaucracy. Where as Marx considered the bureaucracy as an arm of the state and viewed it as exploitative instrument. Weber considered bureaucracy not only as a positive institution but also as a most effective form of organisation to achieve the calculable results of the modern society. However Weber was also criticised on the grounds of lack of internal consistency and dysfunctionality of hierarchy and rules in attainment of objectives of organisation. The ideal bureaucracy advocated by Weber is not suitable to the developing societies. In spite of attracting criticism from several quarters the bureaucracy is gaining its importance in its operations in the modern society. The criticism levelled against the bureaucracy has not resulted in evolving an alternative system to the bureaucracy. Thus it became an inevitable institution for all the political systems for their functioning.

7.6. KEY CONCEPTS

Bureaucracy: Appointed officials in an administrative body.

Weberian Model: Type of bureaucracy propounded by Max Weber, which emphasises on impersonality, rules, written documents and separation of public and private ends in administration.

Impersonality: It is one of the features of Weberian bureaucracy. Here rules are objectively followed irrespective of the person.

Collegiality: Instead of one individual, a group of persons are involved in the decision making process.

Amateur Administration: It emphasises on involving non-professionals and interested individuals in the activities of the administration.

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7.8. ACTIVITIES

1. What is your understanding about the criticism of Mill, Mosca and Michels? Explain.

2. Why the Socialistic countries find it difficult to dismantle the bureaucratic apparatus?

3. Do you agree with the view that the bureaucracy is inevitable in the modern world?