

Patronage

ONE OF THE WIDELY HELD MISCONCEPTIONS about government is the belief that with party change there is a wholesale turnover in personnel. This simply is not true—no matter what the incoming party may be. That it is not true is attributable chiefly to two things: First, it simply is not possible; wholesale turnover would mean complete governmental paralysis. Second, established laws and practices protect the overwhelming majority of governmental employees against arbitrary dismissal.

It is impossible to make wholesale changes because an incoming head has enough trouble directing the operations of a huge, complex organization without first compounding his problem by destroying his organization. Even a substantial percentage of change in personnel, suddenly effected, will wreck morale and so damage nicely balanced working arrangements within the organization as to ruin for the new head all prospect of success.

Civil Service Regulations

Civil Service laws cover most of the government. Departmental regulations and personnel practices, such as appeals procedures for persons aggrieved, add to the complexity of the situation. They alone will baffle, for a while, any new official. It will be his experience to be told repeatedly that he “can’t do” something he proposes.

Yet Civil Service laws are not nearly so rigid as the public believes. They do not guarantee permanent tenure in a particular position; indeed, they do not guarantee permanent employment at all. Under these laws administrators actually can do whatever good administration may require—and good administration requires shifts in policy and changes in personnel. But under Civil Service laws what needs to be done can be done only in certain ways. Personnel is protected against arbitrary action. To the new administrator such protection

will appear to be a barrier to his own efficient management, but this is only because he has not mastered the techniques involved. If he will put to career administrators in the department a statement of his *general* objective and ask them to tell him how to reach it, they will find a way. The incoming administrator is likely to make the mistake of attempting to issue orders based on some one particular way of attaining an objective, and the way may be, and frequently is, utterly illegal. His objective is then defeated. If, on the other hand, he makes it plain that he knows he must proceed in an orderly way and that his concern is with objectives, he will begin to get results. In due course he himself will begin to learn the techniques, and his knowledge of them will increase both the range and the velocity of his power. The man who comes in with a swashbuckling attitude may make a lot of noise in the public prints, but he will not manage to get very much done with and through the resources of his organization.

In my experience, career executives have an amazing loyalty to their departments and to the government, one that usually recognizes the part that policy shifts must play. It was understood in our Department that if in the last few weeks of the Administration we should issue orders designed to predetermine things for our successors, those orders would never actually be implemented and would be brought up for reconsideration almost immediately after our departure from the scene.

Wallace's Personnel Changes, 1933

To return to the fact of small turnover, let me point out that when Henry Wallace became Secretary of Agriculture there were exactly seven positions he could fill without regard for Civil Service processes. (Even in these cases, however, the salaries were, of course, fixed under the Classification Act.) These positions were: two Assistants to the Secretary; two chauffeurs or messengers; the Secretary's Secretary; the Solicitor; the secretary to the Assistant Secretary. Only four of these were actually filled by new appointments within the first three months. One more was filled in the fourth month, the others never. Several of the predecessor-appointees had established career eligibility; four of them are in government service today.

Going back still further, as political and other pressure for jobs

hit us in a terrific and unending broadside, I had occasion to discover that in the preceding Administration only a dozen or two non-Civil Service appointments had been made in the Department, and several of those had been through Executive Orders making eligible widows of valuable, deceased career men. This statement ignores the "Crop Loan" establishment begun in the preceding Administration. It had been largely staffed by the patronage process—it was outside of Civil Service. This establishment was transferred to the Farm Credit Administration, then outside of the Department, early in the Roosevelt administration.

The principal features of the scene for us in the Department of Agriculture in those days of 1933 were then: a Department in which no patronage or non-Civil Service jobs existed (the seven were simply recognized as personal prerogatives and necessities of the incoming Secretary); a country with unprecedented unemployment creating a situation in which literally millions expected that *they* would be given jobs in government; an Administration representing a party which had not been much in power, which was not well acquainted with the legal and administrative restrictions, and which had its hunger for pie whetted first by long years of abstinence and then by wholly unprecedented popular pressure; an Administration brought into power by a political tide demanding great shifts in policy; a Department with a staff composed almost exclusively of Civil Service personnel. Both legislation and administration had to take cognizance of these facts of life.

The Secretary faced the problem of reconciling these facts with the basic necessities of governmental administration. These necessities are at least three in number: (1) It is essential that there be sufficiently direct political control to ensure responsiveness to changed national policies and national needs. (2) It is imperative to maintain and safeguard the career service to assure administrative continuity and technical and managerial competence. (3) It is essential that there be on the part of the public, the politicians, and the administrators adequate realization of the immense importance and delicacy of proper placement.

The recognition and reconciliation of these essentials is a considerable part of the job of public administration. Almost on the same

level of importance is the need to recognize party and public demands for jobs in a way that will support the first- and second-named necessities. This may be regarded as covered by the first necessity listed, but it is not so covered in all respects. With regard to methods of choosing personnel, government must satisfy important popular expectations. In this country there is not the overwhelming reliance on the Civil Service there is in Britain, and government naturally reflects the difference. We may note parenthetically that the Civil Service in Britain has been criticized for not being quite so responsive to policy shifts as it should be.

Need for Adaptability

Certainly in any democratic government there is a problem in making established governmental organisms sufficiently adaptable. The practices in Britain are much more rigid than they are here. Good management, comprehending adequate mobility of the administrative organisms, is dependent on three things: command of the techniques that give control; the sustained competence of a career service; political controllability and adjustability.

It is my belief that the course taken in the Hoover Administration, when the crop, feed, and seed loans were first handled by a non-Civil Service agency, is on the whole a desirable course. That is to say, new governmental agencies frequently need to be set up on a somewhat flexible and political basis, and be converted later into career bodies subject to Civil Service procedures. We have accomplished many such adjustments during the last decade.

New agencies will function best if they are built with a nuclear element of experienced government personnel in the higher brackets. Civil Service usually should be the recruitment basis for the lower-bracket positions. But usually it is not possible by the Civil Service process quickly to identify the rare individuals who would be particularly competent at many of the key jobs required for these new programs. This is especially true in view of the further fact that it is of importance that these new agencies be staffed by people who are genuinely zealous with respect to the new program. Far more often than not it will represent a major Administration policy.

Political endorsement is, of course, no guarantee of the suitability

of an applicant for a place in one of these new agencies. Neither is intelligence. Neither is experience. Neither is honesty. Neither is a pleasing personality. Nor do all of these things put together guarantee even a fairly satisfactory selection. Adequate selection is much more complex than that, particularly for the new agencies through which an administration is trying to satisfy the popular demand that brought it into office. Yet each of these things is a factor, and I see no reason that warrants ruling out the political factor in the case of a program which is of the political essence of the time. On the contrary, I see substantial reasons for including it. The question is *how* to include it, and to this point I shall return several times as I attempt to discuss the structure and the techniques which make for political responsiveness and managerial and technical soundness.

Assuming a legal structure that recognizes new agencies as more political than old ones, I believe certain resources are needed by all secretaries. No incoming secretary, unaided, may be expected to be able to crack the shell of tradition in his department. He therefore needs complete freedom in selecting a few staff aides, the number varying with the size, nature, and complexity of the department. It has become not uncommon for some of the secretary's assistants to be administrative, rather than staff, personnel. It may be that this is necessary. But I have no doubt whatever that he requires some staff men who can make special studies and report to him what they find out, unhampered by administrative responsibilities of any kind. He should be free to select as many as a dozen such aides.

Next, I believe there should be recognition of a right to name up to perhaps a dozen persons in any one bureau and up to a total of perhaps thirty in an entire department—these in addition to his personal staff. This would expand somewhat the latitude he now has under Civil Service rules. These appointments, however, should all be subject to the approval of the Civil Service Commission and to the understanding that they would be used only as and when the need for greater political and administrative responsiveness might develop in unanticipated places. These processes, coupled with his right to demote, promote and transfer and with present Civil Service recognition of "rare bird" and other needs will put a department ade-

quately at the command of the nation, if the secretary knows how to exercise his command.

What I have said takes care in a general way, I believe, of the strictly administrative needs and of the broad secretarial control essential to general political responsiveness. It does not cover, however, the question of adjustment to more specific political realities that are a part of the whole political scene which is government.

The Political Side of Administration

It is my judgment after eleven years on its staff that in the Department of Agriculture we were on the whole too little political rather than the opposite. I do not mean that we were too little affected by pressure groups; I do not mean that we paid too little attention to agricultural politics. I mean that if anything we operated too far away from the party in power; we resisted it too much; we accepted too little responsibility for devising satisfactory ways of recognizing it and co-operating with it.

This is a field in which nicety of distinction is important. There are many examples of individuals and governmental agencies and parties and state and city administrations being *too* political. In Washington the extreme nature of the political demands made on us by some state or local party organizations was usually clear enough so that one could with confidence predict coming political disaster. It was my experience to sense the development of such situations a number of times—and later to see my expectations of disaster realized. I have also seen individuals so ambitious that they became more political than they knew how to be. Such men compromise not in terms of pertinent political realities but in terms of their irrelevant personal ambitions. The result invariably tends to be bad for their functions, bad for their programs, and bad, politically, for them. Consideration of the other fellow is always good politics; but weakness is not.

What I have in mind in saying that we were too little political in the Department of Agriculture is that we made too little effort to draw to the Department the interest, the understanding, and the support of the professionally or constantly functioning political people.

It would obviously have been necessary for us to use discretion. But there were some circumstances in which it would have been possible for us to be political in wholly proper and legitimate ways and thus to generate enlarged popular interest, understanding, and support.

Let me just describe, not our whole political attitude and procedure, which is much too complex for brief discussion, but simply our method of handling patronage. By telling how it began it may be possible to give a very clear explanation.

Recall first the situation that confronted us at the beginning of the Administration: a Civil Service Department in which spoilsmen's jobs were nonexistent; a staff knowing a great deal of pressure-group politics, but on the whole composed of technical people definitely afraid of and unacquainted with party politics; a party new in power expecting to place a large number of important people in important positions and a much larger number of less important party people in less important jobs; unprecedented unemployment, with hundreds of thousands of persons expecting the new Administration to give them employment. Many persons stated their claims merely by asserting that they had always voted the Democratic ticket. Many in effect simply said: "I'm unemployed. When do I go to work, and what is the salary?" One local party worker, in submitting the case of a fellow worker, was kind enough, however, to say that the job would not have to be forthcoming immediately. "We'll have to wait," he said, "until our friend gets out of jail."

There was no way adequately to attend to the applicants and their sponsors. There were neither offices nor personnel available to attend to them. The flood was unprecedented. We were almost equally beset by persons and groups telling of their economic woes and presenting farm plans. Even the thousands of letters of congratulations to the new Secretary were a problem. Meanwhile the business of our getting acquainted with the Department and getting ready to do something about the general farm situation really demanded all our attention.

It did no good to say any of these things to anybody. *Their* needs and demands were important enough to demand attention—and top attention; other people could be handled otherwise. There was no way of convincing the politicians that we had no jobs; such efforts

only made them sure we were giving the jobs to other politicians or—much more probable and criminal in their eyes—to Republicans. (Incidentally, Democratic politicians commonly made the fundamental error of treating as Republicans those who had swung over to the Democratic Party only in 1932. Even those who had also voted for Smith in 1928 were suspect. To be recognized as a Democrat one had to have a political pedigree going back to the cradle. This had the tendency to throw back into the arms of the Republicans those whose votes had changed the Democratic minority into a majority.)

How to Handle Patronage

We were already in an almost impossibly difficult situation by the time the earliest of the new programs came into being. The Civilian Conservation Corps, planned before the inauguration, was the first. It was not made subject to Civil Service procedures. Its administration was a joint responsibility, with a head appointed by the President but with functions assigned to the Departments of War, Labor, Agriculture, and Interior. The two latter agencies had charge of the work programs and had therefore to provide necessary technical direction. For the Department of Agriculture, the Chief of the Forest Service had major responsibility, subject, of course, to the Secretary. It was his duty to make sure that the CCC was staffed with the same kind of personnel as the Forest Service and managed in the same way. He immediately proposed to the Secretary a departmental order providing for this, voluntarily extending Civil Service coverage to the new agency. This made it possible to get a skeletal structure and personnel for which the Chief could accept responsibility. After the beginning had been well made, I called in Major Stuart, the Chief of the Forest Service, and proposed that he now help us out of our political trouble. To persuade him I had to make it easy. I asked him to locate in the new set-up one hundred jobs which could be filled just as well as not from lists of politically endorsed persons, provided the lists were long enough. "You set up the requirements," I told him; "you determine what jobs are to be so filled; you fix the required qualifications. You can be assured that you and not the politicians will actually select the individuals—the politicians will

make the lists, but you will choose the particular man. You can require lists as long as you want. If you don't find a satisfactory man in a given list, we'll call for more lists, with as many names as you want." It took two or three weeks to persuade him and to work out the arrangement. But it proved to be so satisfactory that the Forest Service voluntarily extended the system to cover several thousand CCC jobs. With some variations, this became the departmental system for obtaining personnel for new, non-Civil Service agencies. In order to persuade Major Stuart, I had stumbled upon principles that now seem to me to be of basic importance in handling patronage where patronage has to be handled.

The responsible administrators should determine what jobs are of the type that require only simple qualifications and where, consequently, controlled patronage will not result in deterioration of personnel.

The responsible administrators—not the politicians—must select the specific people who are employed. Whenever a Congressman or a national committeeman says: "I appointed John Smith to a job in X Department," or whenever an employee says: "Congressman Y appointed me to this job," damage is done both to administration and to public attitudes toward public administration. For such remarks have the effect of beclouding responsibility. The administratively protective principle I have described is actually helpful to the politicians, too. They can "clear" for eligibility many more constituents than can possibly be appointed. And they do not have to discriminate between them. All the onus of not appointing all those not chosen falls on the executive branch, and not directly on either the party or the Congressman.

As an illustration of how this works, I recall the case of a Congressman who fathered a bill amending and extending a certain act. It happened that the original act covered an activity under Civil Service, which the Congressman had not realized. The day his measure was approved he came to us demanding that we appoint one of his constituents to one of the new jobs. The circumstances were unusual, and I handled the case outside of our normal procedure. After explaining that under his measure personnel would have to be recruited under Civil Service, I went on to say: "In any case, even if the positions were

not under Civil Service, we could not undertake to appoint any single person you may propose. We have to choose the appointees. . . . But I'll tell you what we'll do. You write me a letter giving me the names and addresses of twelve of your constituents. I'll write to each one, saying that you have urged his appointment to a position and asking for relevant information from all of them. Then, I promise you, we'll appoint one of the twelve to *some* appropriate job." He went away fairly well satisfied.

To the principles mentioned should be added that of concentration of patronage responsibility. To have that responsibility divided among bureaus and among individuals within bureaus, except as other administrative responsibilities must be taken into account, has all the social disadvantages that bureau autonomy has. The effects of patronage then become more and more undesirable, the principles less enforceable, and the patronage less satisfactory politically. By maintaining a single patronage office a department can have a place where all demands come into focus, where they can be balanced as between areas and individuals, and where they can be controlled on the basis of some definite policy. A frankly political office, operating under principle, can defend administrative integrity more effectively than can administrators who are politically aloof.

To our departmental practice there could well have been added a little more conscious and organized search for persons with political prestige, administrative understanding, and desirable policy attitudes to fill a number of places which, as it was, were filled on the basis of straight, non-political selection.

Another point is the desirability of getting something more than simple "clearance" for those persons administrators wish to appoint. Mere clearance is not enough. A Congressman or committeeman, when asked to agree to an appointment desired by an administrator, feels that *he* is doing the administrator a favor and that he is moreover put on a spot where to refuse would make an enemy of the prospective appointee. This does have the advantage of maintaining communication between the Department and the politicians, of reminding the politicians that their wishes are considered, and of saving them the embarrassment of hearing about appointments of their constituents after the fact—all of which is necessary and desirable. But

it should be only one phase of a larger process by which patronage is handled to yield maximum benefits. Administrators can often find throughout the country men of real political standing who possess all the other desired qualifications as well. These men could be used to fill a somewhat larger percentage of the fairly important, non-Civil Service positions than is now the case. Political leaders would accept such selections with enthusiasm and would moreover be drawn closer in communication and understanding by them. The process must not be carried to the point of giving undue emphasis to party politics, of neglecting technical and specialized qualifications, or of undermining administrative responsibility, but it can contribute to total effectiveness.

A Doubtful Asset

It should be said in this connection that, quite naturally, few members of Congress and few committeemen have much perception of the difficulties and importance of proper placement. Few understand that there are in the entire country only a very small number of persons who could properly be considered for the really important executive positions in Washington. Few understand clearly what the delicate complex of qualifications must be. In fact, it may be seriously questioned whether patronage actually confers any net advantage either on members of Congress or the party organizations. Some among the stronger members of Congress almost refuse to have anything to do with patronage, and there are many who would be relieved to have it disappear from the picture. They are all driven, however, by the expectations and demands of their constituents who attribute to members of Congress the function of a precise and direct control of administration which they neither have, can have, nor should have.

Except for this popular demand on them, members of Congress as a whole would gladly see patronage discarded. The larger question is not one of direct political benefit to them but rather one of maintaining and developing greater unity between the legislative and executive branches. The major party, which ordinarily controls both of them, offers practically the sole means of establishing such unity, for the Constitution itself formally divides these two great political

branches. And patronage serves to bring the two branches to at least some little area of common ground. To rule patronage out of even new, non-Civil Service agencies will raise more insistently the question of certain fundamental, structural reforms within the government.