

Bureaucracy vs. Democracy

In the framework of political theory, there are now acute discussions in analyzing the phenomenon of coexistence of democracy and bureaucracy, misunderstandings in the interpretation of the democratic process and differences on limiting bureaucratic power. But the main discussion arises when identifying the place and role of bureaucracy in a modern democratic political system, meaning if bureaucracy is compatible with democracy. There is a rhetorical question in this regard: is it bureaucracy that is a threat to the democratic principles of openness and responsibility? The problem is if control functions of bureaucrats or professional administrators allow manipulation of politicians. The prevailing thought, is, however, that these are politicians who make final decisions. But it needs to be mentioned that, in practice, any decision is firstly processed and prepared by professional administrators before passing it to the politician. According to a majority of analysts, bureaucrats are actually those to govern and produce decisions that are later attributed to presidents, prime ministers, or other politicians. Nowadays, the tensions between the expansion of bureaucracy and the development of democracy are intensifying. To be effective, democracy needs personal involvement of more people, but it can only be achieved by expanding bureaucratic control over political activities and organizations (political parties, trade unions) and concentration of power in the hand of a small group of bureaucrats. Thus, the current paper analyzes the disputes and contradictions that arise when bureaucratic institutes are used in the democratic system.

Bureaucracy is a type of governance that encompasses a strict hierarchy of command from top management to their juniors. Its main characteristics include hierarchy, specialization, qualification, reward and punishment. Democracy is a type of governance that embraces participation of people in electing their leaders. Elected leaders must show credibility in their

policies to justify the trust given to them by voters. People that follow the concept of bureaucracy are rather biased in that they do not observe the public ideas or rather the notions that other people may have (Giddens, 1971, 165). According to democrats, bureaucratic system does not ensure that the public opinion is translated to government and express the power of people. This is the major issue as to why these two always conflict, and their relationship is always tangled.

A major cause of the misunderstanding between the two systems is also a discipline. This is an issue that Grey mainly focuses on in his research (Grey, 1996). According to Grey, there ought to be a lot of discipline in the case of a war, political or corporate to protect an individual from charismatic leadership. Charisma is a trait that has been popular among many bureaucrats and this is seen from their dire need to have a lot of power. With the need for power and in the case of a war, they engage in hostile activities regardless of the condition of the enemy. However, the democrat in this case, does present discipline in that he does not engage in war with any incapable country but rather allows the other country to go peacefully. This reveals they lack the urge for power as compared to their counterparts. The bureaucrat does not usually conform to the steps taken by the democrat to solve a conflict situation because he deems it a waste of resources without any benefits. The democrat, however, insists that taking a subtle step is a way of showing self-discipline and respect that are two very important concepts to understand democratic governance. (Grey, 1996, 115)

A conflict that exists between the two is when referring to the two concepts of contemporary business. At this point, the bureaucrats have an upper hand. When understanding the governing of a location and viewing it from a business managerial point, the positive effects of bureaucracy come in hand. Gay in his works states that to be effective, an organization has to maintain a certain level of honesty when carrying out its practices. Moreover, an organization that

has the bureaucratic system as a means of running business ensures that the company is better prepared for various issues that may affect its running (Gay, 2000, 5). This is because it is organized in a manner that the hierarchy is well established and thus has the multi-level managers take on their responsibilities in the case of an emergency taking place in an organization.

This is the same case when discussing the issue of governance. A bureaucracy has a better chance of surviving in the political environment in the case of abrupt changes taking place in the location. The reason is the same as for companies, there exists a well established hierarchy that ensures that each individual is aware of their responsibilities and consequently incorporation of change is executively effected (Edwards, 1979, 143). This is the issue that creates a clash when dealing with the two: bureaucrats in this case condense upon the democrats stating that their way of governance is insecure and has no way of ensuring that the future of the people in the area is guaranteed.

In the Praise of Bureaucracy is another book that offers insight on the issue of bureaucracy while bearing ground on the issue of business administration. In the book, various case studies assist in understanding the issue with regard to governing. There is the fact that a well-developed bureaucracy is important for it has the top management aware of the progress of each of the employee (Gay, 2000, 3). This is imperative to understand if the workers are taking their jobs seriously. Moreover, there is also the advantage of understanding the management of finance. Through a bureaucratic system, understanding the allocation of funds and the manner in which it is utilized is made simpler. Democratic system does not have a well laid system of governing as that of the bureaucrats and, thus, it conflicts with the manner of administration that democrats use.

A concept that can be used to discuss the conflict between the two concepts is McDonaldization which is a term coined by George Ritzer. The term defines the concept of using

appropriate management to reach a large group of people. This concept is one that takes the side of bureaucracy (Ritzer, 2000, 2). The reason for this is that it majors on ensuring that every level of management has the responsibility of passing on data both vertically and horizontally as long as it gets to a person of lower level. This is the same concept incorporated by bureaucrats who ensure that there is the taking up of positions through the hierarchy. This ensures that information gets to people of lower levels through the immediate subordination. In an effort to prove this point, Ritzer pointed out the triumphs of the company because of using this method. He also offered a list of other companies that have aped this method of management and succeeded in their respective industries.

Moreover, tackling the issue is identifying with a book that solely deals with analyzing the issue of bureaucracy and organizations. Many people in the contemporary environment have grown to support the concept of bureaucracy citing it as one of the major foundations of success. However, reviewing one of the authors is important to identify the faults that these people surpass when carrying out their arguments (Ray, 1999, 179). There is the fact that there is too much concentration of power when running a business in a bureaucratic manner. The concentration of power is what happens where bureaucracy is applied. This is in the case of a political situation where democracy is more applicable, because it has the views of people taken into account to the best way the government can assist them (Gay, 2000, 1). Thus, the concept of bureaucracy is discredited in this situation.

Arguments in support of bureaucratic system are often deterministic. It is shown that a company may require a certain amount of change in order to operate and that it is the bureaucratic system that carries out those changes best. However, carrying out change in an organization is a rather strenuous task and the reason why it is rarely executed. It is important to understand that

organization works daily and the best manner to do this is by employing democracy where the employees have the ability to present their ideas to the upper management. However, this should be done in a regulatory manner (Edwards, 1979, 141). The fact that these arguments are monolithic and do not focus on diverse aspects is one that can make them invalid.

To conclude with, all the arguments presented show an acute contradiction between bureaucracy and democracy. Many variables of bureaucracy and democracy exist and the rubrics supporting these are entirely different. Different authors have different theories regarding this issue and all have concepts that support their arguments. There is no unified idea on how to finally converge them. Moreover, various parties on each side attempt to show the negative aspects of the opposing point of view rather than offering a full spectrum for a greater understanding of the concepts. It is essential to grasp all the aspects with regard to the two systems in order to understand the best action.

References

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