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Introduction to the Study of Public Administration

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Preface

Curiously enough, commentators on American political institutions have never produced a systematic analysis of our administrative system except from the point of view of the lawyer. Until the last few years even the text books have obstinately closed their eyes to this enormous terrain, studded with governmental problems of first magnitude and fascinating interest; and even today they dismiss the subject with a casual chapter. But certainly no one pretends that administration can still be put aside "as a practical detail which clerks could arrange after doctors had agreed upon principles."

The fact is that the last two decades have produced a voluminous literature dealing with the business side of government. The present volume represents an attempt to bring together the salient facts of American experience and observation and to deal with them analytically and critically. To accomplish this within the limits of a single volume is no easy task, implying as it does a constant danger of falling prey either to the Scylla of indiscriminate detail or the Charybdis of unsupported generalization. The total lack of any charted passage through these unexplored waters adds much to the hazards of the venture.

The book rests upon at least four assumptions. It assumes that administration is a single process, substantially uniform in its

essential characteristics wherever observed, and therefore avoids the study of municipal administration, state administration, or federal administration as such. It assumes that the study of administration should start from the base of management rather than the foundation of law, and is therefore more absorbed in the affairs of the American Management Association than in the decisions of the courts. It assumes that administration is still primarily an art but attaches importance to the significant tendency to transform it into a science. It assumes that administration has become, and will continue to be, the heart of the problem of modern government.

Chapter One: Administration and the Modern State

Management has gradually become a profession. Its task has increased in difficulty, responsibility, and complexity, until today it touches all the sciences, from chemistry and mechanics to psychology and medicine. It calls to its service, therefore, men and women with tact and ideals, with the highest scientific qualifications and with a strong capacity for organization and leadership. It is employing lawyers and doctors, accountants and artists, and by directing their professions, is forming a supreme profession of its own, with all the implications consequent upon such a line of progress of standards, qualifications, apprenticeship, and technique.

Oliver Sheldon
Philosophy of Management

1. The Scope and Nature of Public Administration There is an essential unity in the process of administration, whether it be observed in city, state, or federal governments, that precludes a "stratified" classification of

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the subject. To treat it in terms of municipal administration, state administration, or national administration is to imply a distinction that in reality does not exist. The fundamental problems such as the development of personal initiative, the assurance of individual competence and integrity, responsibility, coordination, fiscal supervision, leadership, morale are in fact the same; and most of the subjects of administration defy the political boundaries of local and state government. Health administration, the licensing of medical practitioners, the control of trade, the reclamation of waste lands have little in fact actual relation to cities or counties or states as such. Nor do the respective phases of city, state, or federal government present any significant variation in the technique of their administration. At the outset, therefore, it seems important to insist that the administrative process is a unit, and to conceive it not as municipal administration, or state administration, or federal administration, but as a process common to all levels of government.

Public administration is the management of men and materials in the accomplishment of the purposes of the state. This definition emphasizes the managerial phase of administration and minimizes its legalistic and formal aspect. It relates the conduct of government business to the conduct of the affairs of any other social organization, commercial, philanthropic, religious, or educational, in all of which good management is recognized as an element essential to success. It leaves open the question to what extent the administration itself participates in formulating the purposes of the state, and avoids any controversy as to the precise nature of administrative action.¹

The objective of public administration is the most efficient utilization of the resources at the disposal of officials and employees. These resources include not only current appropriations and material equipment in the form of public buildings, machinery, highways and canals, but also the human resources bound up in the hundreds of thousands of men and women who work for the state. In every direction good administration seeks the elimination of waste, the conservation of material and energy, and the most rapid and complete

achievement of public purposes consistent with economy and the welfare of the workers.

The actual functioning of this branch of government may perhaps be made more realistic by an account of what takes place in a great department in the course of a day. For purposes of illustration a health department in a large city will suffice. Business commences at nine o'clock, when most of the employees are presumably at their desks. As they enter the office, they sign a time sheet or punch a time clock, dispose of their outer garments in lockers, exchange comment with their neighbors and settle down for the day's work. A steady stream of business develops: telephone calls from citizens, from field inspectors, and from special detail; [customer] window calls on a great variety of topics large and small; telegraphic reports from a neighboring city in which an epidemic is threatening; conferences within the bureaus; conferences between bureaus; messengers hurrying back and forth; policemen from local health stations bringing in samples for analysis, and anxious citizens seeking the results of samples brought in yesterday; a deputation from the undertakers protesting against the condition of the hospital morgues; an alderman seeking appointment for a local supporter; a score of prostitutes waiting in the anteroom for examination before appearing in the courtroom; a salesman protesting against the award of a contract for laboratory supplies; a handful of loiterers whispering in casual groups in the corridors, all seeming to the uninitiated observer the height of confusion and disorder. Further observation, however, dispels the first impression; the various kinds of work are segregated and assigned to specially trained men and women; certain types of inquiry or complaint are handled by a standardized method; forms are made out and sent on the proper route for final disposition; some business is transacted by a clerk, other business is referred to the assistant bureau chief, so that by a process of selection routine work is disposed of by the lower ranks of the service, while matters of importance are brought to the attention of the higher officials. Thus proceeds in an orderly fashion all the complicated business of the office; some spend the day making out forms, others filing correspondence, some answering telephone

complaints and directing inspectors, others dictating correspondence, making bacteriological analyses, inspecting ventilation systems, granting licenses, making blue prints, while at the head of the service, the commissioner of public health maintains the necessary connections of the department with the city council and the mayor, with the party organization, with the finance committee, with the public, and with the health authorities of the state and the United States, not neglecting meanwhile to assure himself of the proper operation of the many phases of the work of the department itself.

All of this is a far cry from the Egyptian scribe who labouriously copied accounts on his roll of papyrus, but the natural history of administration connects its ancient and modern forms in an unbroken sequence of development. The process of specialization has indeed wrought a prodigious transformation in methods, but the essential administrative duties connected with military affairs, with finance, with the "king's" household are still performed with the same objectives as in ages past. What differentiates the modern public official from the scribe of antiquity is the marvelous material equipment with which he works, and the contribution which science has made, and continues to make, to his profession.

Public administration is, then, the execution of the public business; the goal of administrative activity, the most expeditious, economical, and complete achievement of public programs. This obviously is not the sole objective of the state as an organized unit; the protection of private rights, the development of civic capacity and sense of civic responsibility, the due recognition of the manifold phases of public opinion, the maintenance of order, the provision of a national minimum of welfare, all bespeak the constant solicitude of the state. Administration must be correlated with other branches of government, as well as adjusted to the immense amount of private effort which in America far more than elsewhere supplements public enterprise. The following chapter deals with these adjustments, but here it is desirable to differentiate the adjacent fields of administration and administrative law.

It is said that "administrative law is that part of the public law which fixes the organization

and determines the competence of the administrative authorities, and indicates to the individual remedies for the violation of his rights."² This definition rightly indicates that the subject matter belongs to the field of law, and points to its major objective, the protection of private rights. The objective of public administration is the efficient conduct of public business.

These two goals are not only different, but may at times conflict. Administration is of course bound by the rules of administrative law, as well as by the prescriptions of constitutional law; but within the boundaries thus set, it seeks the most effective accomplishment of public purposes. The whole matter is tersely set forth by Professor Freund.³

The thought of those interested in public administration seems at the present time to be mainly concerned with problems of efficiency. This is easy to understand. With the rapid expansion of governmental control over all kinds of important interests we have, on the whole, held fast to the self-governmental theory of administrative organization which is not productive of the highest degree of expert knowledge and skill.

Yet increased administrative powers call for increased safeguards against their abuses, and as long as there is the possibility of official error, partiality or excess of zeal, the protection of private right is as important an object as the effectuation of some governmental policy.

Students of government are familiar with the traditional division of governmental activities into the legislative, executive, and judicial.⁴ It is important to understand that the work of the administration involves all three types of activity, although a strict application of the theory of separation of power would seem to confine it to "executive" business. After pointing out that the administrative commission exercises an authority which is in part executive, in part legislative, and in part judicial, Croly asserts "it is simply a means of consolidating the divided activities of government for certain practical social purposes," and proceeds to give a reasoned defense of this fusion of powers.⁵ Administration more and more tends in fact

to reach into the established fields of legislation and adjudication, raising important problems which will be the subject of study in later chapters.

Students of public affairs are gradually discerning, in fact, that administration has become the heart of the modern problem of government. In an earlier and simpler age, legislative bodies had the time to deal with the major issues, the character of which was suited to the deliberations of the lay mind; they were primarily problems involving judgments on important questions of political ethics, such as the enfranchisement of citizens by abolishing property qualifications, the disposition of the public land, the disestablishment of the Anglican Church, or the liberalization of a monarchist state. The problems which crowd upon legislative bodies today are often entangled with, or become exclusively technical questions which the layman can handle only by utilizing the services of the expert. The control of local government, the regulation of utilities, the enforcement of the prohibition amendment, the appropriation for a navy, the organization of a health department, the maintenance of a national service of agricultural research are all matters which can be put upon the statute book only with the assistance of men who know the operating details in each case. So we discover in the administrative service one official who knows all that can be known about the control of water-borne diseases, another who has at his fingertips the substance of all available information on wheat rust, and another who cannot be "stumped" on appropriations for the national park service. These men are not merely useful to legislators overwhelmed by the increasing flood of bills; they are simply indispensable. They are the government. One may indeed suggest that the traditional assignment of the legislature as the pivotal agency in the governmental triumvirate is destined at no distant date to be replaced by a more realistic analysis which will establish government as the task of administration, operating within such areas as may be circumscribed by legislatures and courts.

2. The Emergence of Administration It is from Great Britain of course that the United States derived its administrative institutions. Our local governments were patterned

after the English model in the seventeenth century. Decentralized, self-governmental, dominated by the "squirearchy," they proved to be readily adaptable to the economic and social conditions of the New World. Even today the main lines of our administrative structure are profoundly influenced by their English origin; nowhere in the American commonwealths can be found the prototype of the continental intendant or his successor, the prefect.

But the modern social and economic environment in which administration operates, and the insistent demand for a greater and greater degree of state intervention are destined to force the issue whether a modern industrial, interventionist state can possibly operate on the restricted base of voluntary and substantially amateur effort which characterizes our administrative inheritance. The problems with which officials must grapple are now so varied in scope, so technical in character, so insistent for solution that it hardly seems possible that the state can hold its own except by adopting at least some of the essentials of bureaucratic administration. Is it not now imperative for democratic states to derive the advantage of a civil service characterized by permanence of tenure, special training for official position, professional interest on the part of the public official, undivided loyalty to the interests of the state? No one will understand that this suggestion is in favor of autocratic as contrasted with democratic institutions. But democracies can fruitfully borrow from more highly organized administrative systems those elements which can be properly adapted to their fundamental political institutions in order to make more effective the achievement of their own purposes and programs.

The fact is that the role of administration in the modern state is profoundly affected by the general political and cultural environment of the age. The *laissez faire* school of social philosophy, demanding the restriction of state activities to the bare minimum of external protection and police, created a situation in which administration was restricted in scope and feeble in operation. Officialdom was thought a necessary evil, bureaucracy an ever-present danger. On the continent irresponsible governments, able within large limits to defy the wishes of the

people, and themselves often without programs of social betterment, contributed powerfully to the philosophic argument in favor of nonintervention by the state.

The industrial revolution and its many social, economic, and political implications are fundamentally responsible for the new social philosophy and the new concept of public administration. *Laissez faire* has been abandoned by philosophers and statesmen alike, and a new era of collective activity has been ushered in by the twentieth century. The expansion of industry on a national and international scale, the growth of transportation by railroad, motor truck and airplane, the transformation of communication by modern postal systems, the press, the telegraph, telephone, wireless and radio, the enormously increasing mobility of persons and ideas, the urbanization of industrial states and the crystallization of powerful social classes and economic interests have not only increased the area and intensity of administrative activity, but also have added new types of problems and magnified the importance and the difficulty of the old.

The industrial revolution has necessitated, in short, a degree of social cooperation in which *laissez faire* has become impossible; and gradually the new environment is building up in men's minds a conception of the role of the state which approximates the function assigned to it by the conditions of modern life. These new ideas involve the acceptance of the state as a great agency of social cooperation, as well as an agency of social regulation. The state becomes therefore an important means by which the program of social amelioration is effected. "The power of the civil service is increasing," writes an English scholar, "for the state has given up its old role of acting, in Lassalle's phrase, as night-watchman, as a mere dispenser of justice in the strictest sense of the word. Today it acts on the theory that the good of the individual and of society may be discovered by the processes of social reason and action, and be implemented through statutes."⁶

The enlarging positive program of the state does not imply by any means a corresponding diminution of its repressive and regulative activities. The struggle of classes over the distribution of the social surplus has led to the

intervention of the state on behalf of the economically weak (children, women, labouring classes) by insistence on minimum wage, limited hours of labour, and healthful working conditions; the persistence of various groups of "reformers" has brought about prohibitions and regulations of diverse kinds (sale of cigarettes, narcotics, alcohol, censorship of motion pictures); the need for guaranteeing so far as possible the integrity of the processes of self-government has led to the regulation of elections and political parties, and the elaboration of such repressive legislation as corrupt practice acts.

In every direction, therefore, the task of the modern state is enlarging. In every direction likewise the range of public administration is being extended, for every phase of the new program of the state is reflected in additional administrative activity.

For these reasons it is not surprising that in the last two decades increasing attention has been given to the business side of government. The remarkable thing is that for over a hundred years of our national existence, the only phase of administration to emerge in the arena of national issues was the spoils system. In a brilliant essay Wilson explained the American failure to grasp the importance of sound administration. Writing in the *Political Science Quarterly*, he pointed out:

No one wrote systematically of administration as a branch of the science of government until the present century had passed its first youth and had begun to put forth its characteristic flower of systematic knowledge. Up to our own day all the political writers whom we now read had thought, argued, dogmatized, only about the *constitution* of governments; about the nature of the state, the essence and seat of sovereignty, popular power and kingly prerogative. . . . The central field of controversy was that great field of theory in which monarchy rode tilt against democracy, in which oligarchy would have built for itself strongholds of privilege, and in which tyranny sought opportunity to make good its claim to receive submission from all competitors. The question, how law should be administered with enlightenment, with equity, with

speed, and without friction, was put aside as a practical detail which clerks could arrange after doctors had agreed upon principles.

Unfortunately the future President of Princeton University and the United States never carried his penetrating researches beyond this preliminary study.

The interest of the twentieth century in public administration is due to a variety of causes. Of these the rapidly increasing cost of government, "the unprecedented cataclysm of public expenditure," is one of the most important.⁷ The statement is made that the total revenues raised for municipal, county, state, and national purposes increased from \$2,131,402,000 in 1912 to \$6,346,332,000 in 1922, an increase of 198 percent; and the per capita revenues in 1912 increased from \$21.96 to \$58.37 in 1922.⁸ The total net expenditures of the federal government reached their peak in the fiscal year 1920, at \$5,687,712,849, since when there has been a progressive decline to an annual expenditure of about \$3,000,000,000. The expenditures of the state governments, however, show a rapid increase since the war. In 1913 they were \$3.95 per capita, and in 1922, \$11.82.⁹ Municipal expenditures show a per capita increase for all general departments from \$17.34 in 1912 to \$33.15 in 1922.¹⁰ Dr. Mitchell and his associates estimate an increase in national income, 1913 to 1919, from 33.3 billions to 66.0 billions of dollars, or approximately two hundred per cent. This indicates that national income is not burdened by governmental expenditure to any substantially greater degree in recent years than before the war, but the outcry against high taxes is none the less real.¹¹ The wide publicity given to the rising tide of expenditure, the heavy burden of taxation, and the dramatic efforts of the national administration in favor of economy, have all emphasized the demand for greater efficiency. The pressure for more effective use of public resources is unremitting, and so long as existing high levels of taxation remain, every avenue will need to be explored in order to secure maximum results for every expenditure.

The World War brought into vivid contrast the administrative methods of democratic and autocratic governments, and gave rise to sharp criticisms of the time-honored plan of

"muddling through." At an early date the war was declared to be one between democracy and autocracy, but at a later date there was general agreement that democracy had been forced to adopt the administrative methods of autocracy to gain its end.¹² The various administrative methods employed in the belligerent countries to control the food supply, however, furnish interesting illustrations of the democratic and autocratic approach to specific problems.

On a less dramatic scale, international competition in trade and industry continues to sharpen the demand for efficiency in government. The United States Chamber of Commerce has taken an active interest in greater efficiency "because as business men they already believed in efficiency and economy and wanted to see it applied to the municipal, state, and national governments; because they realized that efficient and economical government was a prime requisite for prosperity and business success; and because as good citizens, they desired to see an honest, sound and intelligent administration." In 1912 at the first annual meeting of the Chamber of Commerce there was discussion of budget reform for the federal government, followed by a referendum which almost unanimously adopted a specific proposal. Year after year the Chamber of Commerce has pressed the matter upon the attention of Congress.

This organization has also urged federal grants for the assistance of vocational schools, a federal department of public works, a general reorganization of the administrative system, improved methods of personnel management, and a permanent planning department in the post office. The New York Chamber of Commerce has also taken an active part in proposing better administration, both state and federal. The reorganization of the consular and diplomatic services achieved by the Rogers Act was urged by business interests. Secretary Hoover's recent revelations of monopolies in rubber, coffee, sisal, and other commodities controlled by foreign governments point to a new phase of international commercial competition which may have important reactions on the problems of our administrative organization. The fact of the matter is that American business has reached the point where it cannot

continue to reap profits merely by enlarging its productivity to catch up with a home market protected by a high tariff wall. It is now a competitor in the world market, and is faced with the necessity of maintaining profits largely by reductions in the cost of production through better management and more effective use of resources. That is, it has been forced to consider on a large scale the reduction of expenses, and the most efficient utilization of its equipment. In this it has preceded government.

The insistence of powerful social groups upon the practical realization of their legislative programs is a constant spur to improved administrative methods. The enforcement of the eighteenth amendment is a significant illustration of the point. The advocates of stringent enforcement legislation failed to insist upon the selection of prohibition officials by merit. The lax and feeble enforcement of the Volstead Act quickly caused the Anti-Saloon League to demand better execution of the law; the issue shifted from policy to administration. This illustrates a universal transfer of interest, for when once a policy has received legislative sanction, the chief problem becomes one of administration. Similarly the agencies interested in limitation of the hours of labour, minimum wage, tax reform, and other issues become powerful exponents of sound administrative methods.

The scientific management movement has had a very important share in stimulating improvement in the methods of carrying on public business.¹³ Commencing with the pioneer work of Frederick W. Taylor, the movement has developed constantly widening interests, and has eventually built up the outlines of a whole philosophy of social betterment on the basis of scientific control of the productive process.

The enormous improvements which have been made by scientific management in some industries have raised the question whether or not equally striking improvements are feasible in government. Whatever answer be given to this question, there can be no doubt that the achievements of scientific management have aroused a vast amount of dissatisfaction with the antiquated methods which have characterized many public offices. More and more clearly it is

being understood that the promise of American life will never be realized until American administration has been lifted out of the ruts in which it has been left by a century of neglect.

NOTES

1. One of the earliest definitions by an American author is found in the following lines written by Woodrow Wilson: "The field of administration is the field of business. . . . The object of administrative study is to rescue executive methods from the confusion and costliness of empirical experiment and set them upon foundation laid deep in stable principle. . . . Public administration is the detailed and systematic execution of public law. Every particular application of general law is an act of administration" ("The Study of Administration," *Political Science Quarterly* 2 [June 1887]: pp. 210, 212).

Goodnow defined the field in these terms: "Such then is what is meant in these pages by the function of administration—the execution, in nonjudicial matters, of the law or will of the state as expressed by the competent authority" (*Principles of Administrative Law of the United States*, [1905] p. 14). Goodnow's writings, however, do not make a clear distinction between administration and administrative law. This distinction is only now emerging in fact. It is recognized by the French phrases *droit administratif* and *doctrine administrative*, by the German words *Verwaltungsrecht* and *Verwaltungskunde*, or *Verwaltungspolitik*. Note also the words "*les sciences administratives*." See below for the author's differentiation.

2. Frank J. Goodnow, *Comparative Administrative Law* 1 (1893), pp. 8–9. The contrast is well brought forth by comparing two articles dealing with the two fields, respectively: J. D. Barnett, "Public Agencies and Private Agencies," *Am. Pol. Sci. Rev.* 18 (1924): 34–48; and J. C. Logan, "Cooperation of Public and Private Welfare Agencies," *Annals* 105 (1923): 88–92.
3. *Proceedings, Am. Pol. Sci. Assoc.* 6 (1909): 58.
4. A careful definition of terms is to be found from the pen of the editor in the *Illinois Law*

Review 15: 108–118. He writes: "Legislation is the declaration, independently of their application, of new rules of compulsory conduct, by an organ of the state, whose powers are specialized to exclude other functions except as incidental. Adjudication is the determination of a specific controversy, by the application of a rule of compulsory conduct, by an organ of the state, whose powers are specialized to exclude other functions except as incidental. The executive function is the factual and ultimate realization of a rule of compulsory conduct through an organ of the state, whose powers are specialized to exclude other functions except as incidental. Administrative power is a fourth term; its functions in pure theory must always be one of the three kinds of powers enumerated, but in practice may be and usually are a combination of two or more of these powers. Clear examples of this combination of powers are the Interstate Commerce Commission, the Federal Trade Board, and the numerous state public utility commissions."

5. Herbert A. Croly, *Progressive Democracy* (1914), ch. 17.
6. Herman Finer, "The Civil Service in the Modern State," *Am. Pol. Sci. Rev.* 19 (1925): 277–289.
7. See Henry J. Ford, *Cost of Our National Government* (1910); Edward B. Rosa, "Expenditures and Revenues of the Federal Government," *Annals* 95 (1921): 1; Herbert D. Brown, "The Historical Development of National Expenditures," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 9 (1921): 336–346.
8. "The Trend in Public Expenditures," *Annals* 113, pt. 1 (1924).
9. Austin F. MacDonald, "The Trend in Recent State Expenditures," *Annals* 113 (1924): 8–15; cf. Minnesota Tax Commission, "Cost of Government in Minnesota," *Biennial Report* (1918). "The economic fact which is going to force good municipal government—even scientific management in city affairs—is the growing cost of the undertaking. It is only

because we do not have the figures which represent the difficulty of the task ahead of us that we are not appalled by it." Morris L. Cooke, "Scientific Management of the Public Business," *Am. Pol. Sci. Rev.* 9 (1915): 488–495; cf. "The Cost of Government, City of Detroit," *Public Business* 80: 97 (published by the Detroit Bureau of Governmental Research).

10. Lane W. Lancaster, "The Trend in City Expenditures," *Annals* 113 (1924): 15–22.
11. National Bureau of Economic Research, *Income in the United States* 1 (1921): 13.
12. Cf. Charles G. Fenwick, "Democracy and Efficient Government—Lessons of the War," *Am. Pol. Sci. Rev.* 14 (1920): 565–586.
13. See Frank B. Copley, *Frederic W. Taylor, the Father of Scientific Management* (1923); Horace B. Drury, *Scientific Management, A History and Criticism* (1915); Edward E. Hunt, *Scientific Management since Taylor* (1924); General William Crozier, "Scientific Management in Government Establishments," *Bulletin of the Taylor Society* 1 (1915); C. B. Thompson, "Literature of Scientific Management," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 28 (1913–1914): 506–557; Henry H. Farquhar, "Positive Contributions of Scientific Management," *Ibid.* 33 (1918–1919): 466–503 and "Critical Analysis of Scientific Management," *Bulletin of the Taylor Society* 9 (1924): 16–30; Frederick A. Cleveland, "The Application of Scientific Management to the Activities of the State," *Tuck School Conference on Scientific Management* (1912): 313–335; Morris L. Cooke, "The Influence of Scientific Management upon Government," *Bulletin of the Taylor Society* 9 (1924): 31–38.

Note also William H. Leffingwell, *Office Management* (1915); Richard H. Lansburgh, *Industrial Management* (1923).

For a very significant change in the attitude of organized labour toward management read "Labour's Ideals Concerning Management," by President William A. Green of the American Federation of Labour, *Bulletin of the Taylor Society* 10 (1925): 241–253.