

Bureaucratic World: Is it Unavoidable?

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Abstract. An excess and inefficiency of the control mechanisms in the present day societies is commented.

Esteemed Colleagues:

The remarks below concern a certain lack of equilibrium in the present day legislation, affecting the life and science, with rather adverse consequences for our work. The disequilibrium seems to privilege the fashionable problems such as the “political correctness”, “sexual harassment, etc. While those are visibly exaggerated, some urgent subjects are left unattended. One of them is the

Bureaucratic Harassment,

an epidemic phenomenon, which grows without any reasonable limit.

Though the trouble is not new, its consequences in the present day society are increasingly awkward, causing serious doubts whether the democracy is indeed the best of the systems. The human life is affected by too many unnecessary and obviously absurd regulations which could be easily avoided by an enlightened medieval autocrat. (The whole problem is, of course, how to assure that the autocrat will be indeed enlightened!) Yet, we often feel that some of our problems would be solved in few minutes by a despotic ancient king, whereas they need some months or even years of struggles in our present day institutions.

The disease affects all areas, though it seems specially damaging for the activities which require some peace of mind, concentration and creative work. We refer, of course, to the arts and science. The damage to the science consists not only in our loss of time, but much more in the fact that the scientist of today is forced to subordinate himself to some counter-intellectual patterns of reports and planning, forcing him indeed to accept the professional dishonesty. The most absurd demand he faces is to present the program (and the time-table) of his future discoveries. Such plans can bring the best results if they fail, since only then they can reveal something new. In fact, the discoveries of radioactivity by Becquerel and by Pierre and Marie Curie, or penicillin by Alexander Fleming, occurred thanks to the frustrations of their initial projects. Neither the excursion of Christopher Columbus could accomplish his original plan to discover the shortest way to India.

The only thing discovered by CC was an obstacle, on which we live today!... When composing his irrelevant projects, ironically, the scientist is a victim of an almost paranoid suspicion, obliged to document every little detail of any routine spending, precisely when he intensely tries to be honest, at least in frames of the obligatory bureaucratic fiction!... (Needless to say, the truly significant frauds occur much above the bureaucratic control levels).

The abstract pollution...

More inconsistencies. While the urgent need to protect our natural environment is already recognized [1, 2, 3], the destruction of our lives by too many rules, documents, etc., that is, the *pollution of abstract environment*, progresses without any defense... The examples are abundant and increasingly alarming.

El Pais [4] describes the executives of one of the Town Councils increasing the bureaucratic demands – to enforce bribes for “resolving the problem”... The journal *Rzeczpospolita*, Poland, August 2011, reports a tragic error in an oncology clinic where the doctors removed the healthy kidney instead of the cancerous one. The journal comments: “the good specialists escape, but the administration grows”. About a year ago, a bureaucratic homicide was committed in one of hospitals. A middle age man had a heart attack on the street. Somehow, he was still able to walk to the near hospital, but was not admitted because of the lack of obligatory documents. He died on the hospital steps. Unfortunately, such “incidents” are not exceptional... Meanwhile, the scientists cannot work, since they are too busy with bureaucratic plans and reports. The engineers cannot construct highways, since they are too busy navigating through the jungles of regulations. New forms of business appear: the enterprises which help the scientists to formulate their grant requests in terms convincing for the bureaucrats. (The corruptive consequences are not difficult to guess!...)

We think, you can easily provide a collection of your own examples. A question arises, how such phenomena could at all develop? To explain this, we formulated 4 laws of bureaucracy which you might find relevant:

Four Laws of Bureaucracy:

- I.** All attempts of the state administrations to improve the scientific work by bureaucratic projects, reports, etc. will be reduced to zero by the social organism – though not gratis: the price is an enormous increase of socially useless work.
- II.** What is the source of the incredible facility of public administrations in multiplying endlessly the prescriptions, formalities and obligatory documents? The reason is that the bureaucrats do not perform the bureaucratic work: they leave it to their victims.
- III.** In the bureaucratic environment the problems of little importance are always infinitely more urgent than the truly important ones. This is why *thou will never do anything important*.
- IV.** The knowledge of the four bureaucracy laws won't help you in anything.

Our formulations are deliberately simplified, just to illustrate the center of the problem. But... how can we break the law of impotence **IV**? Should we support the spontaneous rebellions? Do we dream to live in a complete anarchy? This, most evidently, cannot be the solution. The public administration must always exist. The only problem is to have a good administration instead of an excessive one. While the question is simple, the answer is not. The “bureaucratic disease” is a deep civilization crisis marking the “childhood’s end” of humanity. Our distant and recent past shows how it developed.

From prehistory to the dark age

The prehistoric population obeyed shamans and tribal leaders. There was still no much bureaucracy. The subsequent evolution subordinated the human masses to the formal laws, assuring some stability in turbulent epochs. The industrial revolutions of the XVIII and XIX c. in Europe and America created new bureaucratic classes emerging from some (more or less) credible elections. It is interesting that the passports still did not exist at the beginning of XIX c.; they were invented by governments (supposedly) to facilitate travels. In XX c., some countries were affected by highly despotic types of bureaucracy. One, introduced in Russia by the communist party, was supposed to represent higher social formation, next after the capitalism, granting the social equality by eliminating the private property. To assure the universal equality, the soviet state was organized as a hierarchy of party levels, each higher supervising each lower one, with the corresponding administrative privileges. (But the majority of soviet citizens could not even dream about passports. The Soviet workers needed special permissions to travel inside of the Soviet state). Far from constituting a superior, post-capitalist society, the system developed only a highly unproductive economy, based on compulsive work in collective farms. In contrast with the neo-liberal ideas, it was indeed a neo-feudal society which could survive only due to an extreme bureaucratic control and terror, but finally collapsed, leaving in ruins one of the richest countries of the world. Equally disastrous results were achieved by the ‘national socialism’ in Germany with its ideology of hate and racial superiority. Both show how the brainwashed populations (including the scientists) can be dominated to the obsessive ideologies [5, 6], the danger which should not be forgotten.

Is the democracy failing?

When the totalitarian systems collapsed, it could seem that the best structure for modern society was at hand: it should follow the design of western democracies, with all its imperfections. This, of course, does not mean that all dreams of equality can be fulfilled. Since people are different, the “demos” cannot assure the equal status to everybody. It is enough to imagine an angry crowd marching and demanding: “One Mercedes Benz for each poor, one Mercedes Benz for each poor!”... to understand the impossibility of the truly egalitarian society. Even if the Mercedes factories had a sufficient production power, do you imagine the Earth surface devastated by billions of cars?

The democratic systems, henceforth, cannot achieve an authentic equality. At the best, they can be the “soft” versions of the “Brave New World” of Aldous Huxley [7]. The power should be in hands of enlightened elites. The rest of citizen (the *demos*) must have some decent jobs and salaries, but indeed, they are just a kind of biological reserve, which should live happy, without unnecessary ambitions. . . More precisely: to live in a harmless passivity (if not *idiocy?*), entertained by sport games, competitions of singers, etc., with some elementary education, sufficient to choose talented youngsters to renew the government, to the satisfaction of the *demos*.

Yet, even this design suffers some destructive mechanisms. One of them is a constant increase of bureaucracy, caused by the rapid growth of the human crowds, with inflationary phenomena visible in all areas of life, in particular, in science. The present day professionals are evaluated according to the number of publications rather than results. Under the bureaucratic pressure, this number blows up so fast, that the world journals have not enough experienced referees to evaluate the papers. So, the inexperienced authors must serve as the referees for their equally inexperienced colleagues. The editors are in trouble. They organize conferences asking to reduce the avalanche of publications, but the bureaucratically inflated bubble of “productivity” grows practically without any control. Recently, the editors of some journals took the task in their own hands, rejecting most of papers which do not seem to follow the promising trends, even though the method has some corruptive aspects (forming the privileged influence groups inside of the scientific community). Looking for some better criteria, the science administrators estimate the papers by their impact (citations). However, this too turns questionable (a lot of authors cite papers which they never read!). In the hasty, superficial development, the top achievements of the past become too difficult for the new generations and are left in oblivion (though from time to time rediscovered). In the bureaucratically organized science, many specialists feel that they will never advance if they won’t occupy executive positions (and they are probably right!). The interdependence between the scientific and politico-bureaucratic levels extends everywhere. The well-known University rankings are based rather on public relations than on scientific status, and so are the titles of “Doctor *honoris causa*”, offered usually to the politicians. So, did our civilization reached the top of its creative possibilities like the civilization of ants or termites? Perhaps not, but the future remains unclear.

Heavy or light pathologies?...

By trying to complete the picture, one cannot escape conclusion that the *bureaucracy* has no natural limits. Of course, apart of exceptions, the *bureaucrats* are not evil. They simply try to fulfill their work in peace, even if their peace destroys the peace of others. The results, though, are not at all innocent.

One of obsessive bureaucratic problems in European Union was the polemic about the legal definition of a carrot. Is the carrot a fruit or a vegetable? Of course, the question was motivated by financial problems which we skip here. The final

verdict, after more than one decade of costly debates, was that the carrot is a fruit if cultivated in Portugal, otherwise it is a vegetable. Pleased by this success, the European bureaucracy invested the next efforts to define the legal parameters (size and curvature) of cucumbers and bananas... Worse, since the present day administrations try to apply the same method to define a good scientist: requesting the numbers of publications in prestigious journals, the numbers of graduated students, the list of financially supported “projects”, etc. etc. ... The detailed demands differ in various countries and institutions, but everywhere the scientists have a full time job reporting their numerical parameters. The phenomenon is not limited to the science. In almost all areas, the employees must report their parameters to demonstrate that they are enough productive (but not too conflictive!) to advance in hierarchies, to become directors, secretaries, government consultants, etc., etc. ... (Poor human carrots?...).

Crisis and consequences

The situation is additionally complicated by the economical crisis, much deeper than the famous collapse of 1928. One of problems seems to be that the economy of the rich countries was too dependent on the redundant (unnecessary) goods. Only thanks to an enormous self-confidence (if not arrogance) of the consumers these products could be sold. . . Simultaneously, it turns out obvious that money is illusionary (even if the lack of money can be real!). The mega-frauds are so spectacular, that even pumping billions of illusionary money into illusionary goods might require some patience to save the situation... Worse, since the bureaucrats in panic try now to apply an inverse doctrine, by cutting funds for all areas, including the science (the famous “austerity”!), They also try to introduce some utilitarian principles into the scientific research. As turns out now, the scientists should not waste their time for abstract problems, but they should show their capacities by looking for innovations, patents, technological solutions, to improve the financial results of the decaying industries. The recipe, though, seems questionable:

1. The crisis started precisely in countries which were leaders in technology and innovation.
2. Around 1905 Albert Einstein was working in the Swiss patent office. Were he forced to dedicate his attention to invent patents, he might have no time and energy to write down his historical works on quantum theory of light and special relativity, with enormous losses for all patents of the future. . .
3. The innovations are not necessarily benign. The sequence of discoveries in the food conservation techniques permitted to achieve high profits in the industry of fast food and refreshments. However, the chemically conserved products are not neutral for the health of the consumers; they cause the overweight, diabetes, and many other troubles.
4. The modern industries are literally infested by innovations, so the examples can be multiplied at will. One of most typical situations is observed in medical industries which besides the impressive discoveries contains also a list of failures, from the well-known case of “*Thalomid*”, up to the recent affair

of the plastic breast implants. (For other deceptions, see John le Carré, *Big Pharma*, Google.)

The present day crises might be indeed an occasion to invest (see Paul Krugman), but the investments should be the results of careful, long term projects, creating perdurable goods, and not of precipitate campaigns trying to convince the scientists to change their profession, converting themselves into the “innovation champions”. While the problem of healthy interaction between the fundamental and applied science is not yet solved, the situation was still more complicated by the recent progress of modern technology.

The informatics revolution

Some time ago, a persistent idea was that the youngsters cannot contribute to the public opinion. However, the informatics revolution abolished a lot of mythologies. Today, the teenagers have their personal lives and personal opinions. Together with young adults, communicated by blogs and twitters, they form a volatile mass with high capacity of mobilizing, either with constructive or destructive aims. At the moment, the e-revolution had some spectacular effects, such as the collapse of several authoritarian regimes. Yet, it also awoke fears... The world administrations are scared. Under various arguments (e.g., the copyright defense) they try to introduce the global inter-net censorship. The copyright problem of course should be solved, but without affecting the freedom of communication. If not, then by intensifying the press and internet controls, the state bureaucracies can create a dark, neo-totalitarian future exceeding even the fantasies of Aldous Huxley [7] or George Orwell [8], or hybrids of both [9]. In fact, if our recent crisis proves something, it shows that the truly weak point of the bureaucratic system is not an insufficient control of the human masses (including the scientists) but rather the complete lack of control on the upper social levels (banks, governments, parliaments, etc.). So, perhaps, the e-revolution could be the needed equilibrium factor?

The Anti-parliament?

Indeed, while our adult generation may be too busy or too tired, the blogging and twitting masses of youngsters, even without legislative powers, form already a world Forum, a kind of Anti-parliament able to identify the symptoms of our social diseases. Given enough time, some talented youngsters, instead of the dangerous sport of hacking might make their contribution to the future, collecting data about our structural and legal problems, detecting cases of bureaucratic and legislative nonsense all over the world. Indeed, it would be excellent to establish the Guinness records and prizes for the most talented absurd hunters!

A tempting idea would be also to create the archives of the *bureaucratic abuses*. In fact, in all countries the public life is infested by excessive demands facilitating the work of the bureaucratic apparatus, but the trouble caused by these demands exceeds massively the administrative gains they can bring. The detailed archive of such redundant laws would be of significant help.

In fact, one can only wonder, how could it happen that amongst enormous variety of sociological sciences, the studies of the *bureaucratic pathology* are still missing in the research institutes?

We are aware that many ideas presented here are not precisely defined, yet, they might be useful to defend some residues of our freedom. We live in a turbulent epoch of early prehistory, facing the challenges which only the future can resolve. Our Anti-bureaucratic web-page will be open for your opinions and ideas. Are we ready to say: *Vive la liberté*? Best regards.

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