**SOC 3150: Classical Sociological Theory**

**Lecture 22: Max Weber and Bureaucracy II**

* Last class we discussed Weber`s views on bureaucracy very much in *ideal-typical* terms. Thus, it was portrayed as:
  + `The purest type of exercise of legal authority``
  + Technically efficient
  + Formally the most rational means of exercising authority
  + Superior in precision, stability, discipline, and reliability
  + Exhibiting high calculability of results
  + Widely applicable in scope to many administrative tasks
* This was a purposeful exaggeration of the rational characteristics of bureaucracies – useful for heuristic purposes and for studies of organizations – but not to be mistaken for a realistic depiction of the way bureaucracies actually operate
* Thus, despite these positive traits rooted in formal rationality, as noted last class, Weber also saw a *downside* to bureaucracy. Today I will outline these, and add a few items to illustrate

**Weber`s Reservations about Bureaucracy:**

* He saw its progressive rationalization as part of the ongoing ``disenchantment of the world`` in modern society;
* He was aware of the `red tape` that often makes dealing with bureaucracies so frustrating (e.g. one is just a number). Indeed, he was concerned about this undermining the goal of efficiency;
* He saw the rationalization that dominates all aspects of bureaucratic life as a threat to individual liberty (``everyone becomes a cog in the machine``…Seeing oneself in that light, one may soon as how to transform oneself into a bigger cog``);
* He was wary of the tendency to develop secrecy with regard to knowledge and intentions, excluding the public from decision making and the production of consensus.
* He was concerned about nepotism, favoritism, and internal politics undermining rational goals. Indeed, he worried about the difference between the rules as written and what really goes on;
* Weber saw bureaucracy as potentially undermining democratic government (e.g. `rights` must be enforced; public acquiescence to “experts”; manipulation by powerful interest groups);
* Weber was appalled by the effects of bureaucratization and rationalization of the world (of which it was part). Yet, he saw no way out (i.e. they were an `iron cage`). He thus describes bureaucracies as ``escape proof,`` ``practically unshatterable,`` and among the hardest institutions to destroy once established;
* Similarly, he felt that individual bureaucrats could not `squirm out` of the system once they were `harnessed` in it;
* Weber saw no possible alternative to bureaucratic administrative structures in modern society. Things would be even worse under socialism where there would be no private sector counterbalance to the control of bureaucrats;
* Weber saw a small ray of hope in professionals who stand outside the bureaucratic structures and have a greater degree of autonomy and influence. Yet they may also be drawn in and co-opted as ``experts``;
* He also pointed to sects and groups who practice an ``ethic of responsibility,`` focusing on independence, larger values, and alternative means of achieving them in modern society as minimally hopeful;
* Nevertheless, Weber concluded overall that ``the future belongs to bureaucratization`` and time has borne out his prediction.

**Some Illustrative Examples:**

**(1) Brymer`s Productive vs. Client-oriented Bureaucracies:**

* Technological rationalization lies at the heart of bureaucratization. Goals (e.g. profit, span of control, stability) & means of achieving them are quantified & organized categories, steps & structures are put into place to achieve them;
* There is a distinction to be made between:

(1) *Production oriented* bureaucracies (which emerged first);

(2) *Client oriented* bureaucracies (growing since 1930s)

* Production oriented bureaucracies (e.g. manufacturing businesses) concentrate on workers performing standardized, identical operations and making physically identical products to turn a profit. Efficiency is monitored in terms of number of products produced and changes in profit margin. Responsibility for failure occurs within the organization.
* In Client-oriented bureaucracies, on the other hand (e.g. social services):
  + standardized organizational categories and labels are developed by ``experts`` into which individual clients are placed and treated identically (i.e. not as unique individuals). Even `pseudo-personalism` is technologically rationalized (e.g. selling smiles). Both the service provider and the client become products;
  + quantifiable goals are created that have little to do with the clients flowing through them (e.g. universities are concerned about increasing enrolment numbers largely out of a concern with their link to greater government funding. Deviance & crime statistics are defined as objectively and scientifically real to help justify programs in the CJS);
  + It is difficult for organizations to fail as their goals are often defined in such a way as to ensure success
  + responsibility for failure is diffused outside the organization and onto the client (`blamability``), who is held liable (e.g. non-compliant welfare clients, failing students, often with the implicit lesson ``ìt`s for your own good. You`ll do it right…listen next time``)
  + Multiple stigmatization of clients is increasingly possible due to growing, interactive links between expanding client-oriented bureaucracies and increasing computer databases
  + In the case of quantifying deviance, this actually increases injustice as a result of an official focus on clearance rates and the most efficient processing of cases through the system

**(2) Ginsberg: The Fall of the Faculty:**

**The Rise of the All Administrative University:**

* Until recently, universities were led mainly by their faculties, which viewed intellectual production and pedagogy as the core missions of higher education.
* Today, "deanlets"--administrators and staffers often without serious academic backgrounds or experience--are setting the educational agenda.
* Ginsburg, recognizing the large increase in government and other demands, examines the fallout of the rampant administrative blight that now plagues universities.
* In the past decade, universities have added layers of administrators and staffers to their payrolls every year even while laying off full-time faculty in increasing numbers--ostensibly because of budget cuts.
* Ginsberg explains the many ways in which administrative authority has elbowed aside faculty governance in the running of today's colleges and universities. Two examples:
  + Many administrators are career managers who downplay the importance of teaching and research, for example by advocating for a banal "life skills" curriculum.
  + legitimate grievances of minority groups and liberal activists, traditionally championed by faculty members, have, in the hands of administrators, been reduced to chess pieces in a game of power politics. By embracing initiatives such as affirmative action, administrators gained favor with these groups and legitimized a thinly cloaked gambit to bolster their power over the faculty.
* Ginsberg argues that universities have degenerated into poorly managed pseudo-corporations controlled by bureaucrats so far removed from research and teaching that they have barely any idea what these activities involve.
* He attacks virtually everyone from overpaid presidents and provosts down through development officers, communications specialists and human-resource staffers but especially the midlevel "associate deans" and "assistant deans" who often have the most direct control over faculty.

\* This ends our discussion & critique of bureaucracy.