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THE WEBERIAN BUREAUCRATIC PRINCIPLES AND
NIGERIAN PUBLIC BUREAUCRACY: AN EVALUATION
BY

JIDE IBIETAN AND SAMUEL ONI

ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to highlight and reinforce the indispensability of the Weberian bureaucratic principles to the effective functioning of public sector organisation. Weber's theoretisation on bureaucracy had suffered numerous damaging criticisms from scholars; however, the contributions remain unassailable. Using this model as benchmark, the paper attempted an evaluative excursion of the Nigerian Public Service and examined the extent of conformity with the principles in practice. The paper observed that the search for efficiency in the Nigerian public bureaucracy has been a very tall task with one reform committee replacing the other from 1934 to date. The noticeable features of the various reform efforts via their reports are attempts at organizational/institutional development and measures targeted at enhancing managerial capacity. Weber's characterization (legal rational authority) of bureaucracy underscores the essence of these reform initiatives and it also constitutes the fulcrum of the Nigerian public bureaucracy. The paper recommended among others, the objective implementation of measures aimed at improving efficiency in the public service, zeroing-in on entrenching merit while seeking to preserve federal character in appointments and promotions.

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian Public Service, otherwise known as the Nigerian Bureaucracy is a child of the British Colonial Public Service. In other words, the present arrangement of ministries, departments and agencies of government derived largely from the British system of colonial administration. At its inception, the British civil service had two broad objectives namely, to maintain law and order which Adamolekun (2000) euphemistically captured as the concept of "night watchman". The other objective which Onimode (1983) in Ezeh (2008:318) referred to as revenue generation found expression in the utilization of the public service and its personnel to exploit and expropriate local or indigenous natural and mineral resources to develop the metropole. Frank (1972) epitomized this metropole-hinterland relationship in his centre-periphery model of the dependency theory.

Following the 1914 Amalgamation of Southern and Northern Nigeria and the Lagos colony, two levels of administration existed. "Lord Lugard was, on one hand, directly responsible for fashioning and supervising the British politics of oppression, particularly as it affected difficult and non-complying communities and,... administrative matters in which Lugard was directly in charge of, together with few British officials" (Ezeh, 2008:318). The exploitative motive of the colonialists seems obvious from the numerous scholarly accounts and as reinforced by the centre-periphery model highlighted above.

The major structural division of personnel in the Nigerian public service corresponded to the 1954 Gorsuch (Report) classification which are as follows: Administrative/Professional class; Higher/Technical Executive; Clerical/Artisan; and messengerial/manipulative. These categorization which have been slightly modified due to successive reforms explain the academic standards/requirements pursuant to entry into such grades.

The Nigerian Bureaucracy performs a number of functions. One of such is the provision of services that are deemed to be of necessity and which would otherwise have been outside the reach of the common man. An example of public goods/services, which requires tremendous improvement at the moment is the basic health care for the citizenry. Access to and quality of basic health care delivery have collapsed to the extent that Mimiko (2010:12) painfully but factually referred to each household in Nigeria as operating a micro-municipal governance system. Under this system, each household or unit generates its electricity via generator, water from boreholes, disposes its domestic wastes and attends to its health care needs through private clinics or pay for drugs in government hospitals.

Another public good or function of the public sector that had been taken for granted over the years due to lack of lustre performance of its apparatus and personnel is security. Recent news from various media (print and electronic) confirm how cheap life has become in our nation as innocent lives are lost in very horrible and avoidable circumstances. Functional and qualitative education also constitutes one of the perceived roles of the Nigerian public service. Notwithstanding that the country continues to perform poorly on every available indicator of the Human Development Index. Other sundry services include provision of potable/drinking water; reliable public electricity supply; efficient and just judicial administration to mention but a few. The extent to which these services have been delivered is subject to debate.

An important function of the Nigerian Bureaucracy is that it acts as agent of development. This is predicated on its potentials at marshalling human and materials resources required for economic growth and development. The role of public service in collecting data; disseminating information and ideas; analyzing data for policy

decisions; weighing alternatives (including costs and benefits) and proffering possible courses of action are essentially noteworthy in this regard.

The Nigerian Bureaucracy has witnessed phenomenal growth in size, with a total staff strength of less than 30,000 at independence, it grew to 45,154 in 1970; 98,877 in 1974; 213,802 in 1988; 273,392 in 1990; and about 200,000 in 1998 (Obi, 2007:21). In explaining this geometric growth, Abdulsalami (1988:49) adduced the following reasons: the attainment of independence in 1960 with its attendant high expectations for rapid socio-economic development in the country necessitated the creation of several institutions. Secondly, the creation of states from the old regional structures in 1967, and further sub-divisions in 1976, 1991 and thereafter brought about the need for more hands in the services of the states' bureaucracy. Additionally, the massive increase in oil revenues from 1972 enabled the Federal Government to embark on very many developmental projects/programmes necessitating the expansion of existing bureaucracies and the creation of new ones. The perpetration of military rule for over three decades since independence has led to the dominance of the central government in the affairs of this country with the attendant consequences of more bureaus requiring personnel.

The Nigerian Bureaucracy and Max Weber's Ideal Construct: an Evaluation

Having laid the above background, it is proper at this point to explore Max Weber's ideal construct and principles for comparative purposes with the Nigerian Bureaucracy. Max Weber (1864-1920) directed the attention of mankind to why leaders expect compliance with orders given to their subordinates. This coincided with the three types of authority namely: traditional; charismatic and rational-legal. Most of Weber's writings centred on the rational-legal

Additionally, in order to overcome some of the recurrent problems and dilemma, this paper recommends the following:

- i. Re-orientation or rebirth in the Nigerian civic life through the instrumentality of a purpose-driven and transformational leadership. In this regard, the political/electoral process that throws up mediocre and unfocused leadership should be jettisoned.
- ii. Sustenance and facilitation of improved management philosophy and techniques like Management By Wandering Around (MBWA); Management By Objectives (MBO); leaders should endeavour to live by credible examples and practice Honest, Open and Transparent (HOT) communication style.
- iii. Periodic review (in line with prevailing economic realities) in remuneration and motivational packages devoid of combative industrial relations process.
- iv. Objective implementation of the principle of federal character by entrenching merit while seeking to achieve proportional geo-political representation.
- v. The process of political/democratic and bureaucratic decentralization (devolution and deconcentration) should be done with much consideration for national wealth and resource availability.
- vi. The anti-graft war should be pursued with vigour and without selection. This has the potency of exposing corrupt public office holders, and ensuring that justice is not only done, but seen to be upheld, thus serving as deterrent to potential offenders. This can assist in redressing the prevalence of corruption in the public service as identified by some civil service reform panels.

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