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Book Reviews

Edward C. Page and Bill Jenkins, *Policy Bureaucracy. Government with a Cast of Thousands*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, xix + 214 pages.
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The authors make a welcome contribution to knowledge on government. They explore a black box in political science: the role middle-ranking officials play in national policymaking. The book provides an innovative theory and a plausible explanatory framework about a classic problem in democracies: how political rationales and bureaucratic logics of action combine inside state institutions. Despite the fact that it basically deals with UK findings, it should attract the attention of scholars and practitioners worldwide.

Public servants who in Whitehall occupy jobs and fulfil roles in the middle of organizational hierarchies influence in a relevant and lasting manner policy outcomes, even in major domains such as human rights and European legislation. They do not intervene just on unimportant details. Rank-and-file bureaucrats in their own way are policymakers. Government involves a large number of actors. To the political actors such as parties, members of parliament, lobbyists, ministers and administrative elites one should add a vast number of anonymous employees sitting in hundreds of bureaus across the state machinery.

Page and Jenkins formally express modest ambitions and adopt a soft approach to the topic. Their book is quite concise and short. It uses no jargon. Moreover they do not imitate so-called best practices that are usually recommended to doctoral students, at least in many universities. For instance, while they take advantage of perspectives developed by the sociology of organizations, they carefully avoid 'direct discussion of other more currently fashionable theoretical perspectives such as principal-agent theory, neo-institutionalism, network or ''policy community'' frameworks. . . .' (page ix). Another illustration of their apparent low profile is given by the fact that, despite having interviewed 128 middle-ranking officials in 13 departments, they claim a quite inductive approach. Quantophrenic reviewers would criticise most interviews as quite short (less than 30 minutes), the questions as very loosely structured, the population as having no random sampling validity, and the data as treated in a qualitative manner.

Page and Jenkins approach 'the issue in a spirit of curiosity' (page vii). The net result is quite provocative and convincing. This is inductive research at its best. In less than 190 pages, with elegant English and clarity in wording, they deliver a series of quite relevant findings and convincing interpretations. Who are the policy bureaucrats in Whitehall? While they cannot be precise about their numbers, they are drawn from a massive cohort of over 106,000 people that include the four grades below the 4,000 top Senior Civil Service level officials. They tend to be male and most make careers in the middle ranks, although the group includes high fliers on their way up and those aspiring to be promoted to the senior civil service levels. They differ from top civil servants in that they are less likely to have an Oxbridge background.

These rank-and-file officials are involved in policymaking, not because they are policy activists or for partisan reasons (clientelism, spoils system), but because of their bureaucratic tasks. They intervene before laws or decisions are drafted by the political sphere, for they have know how about how to shape the forms. They also intervene once a policy is legitimized politically, for they are experts in setting up implementation schemes and procedures.

The book illustrates in detail the range of activities involved in what might be called policy work and suggests a rather robust typology: project, maintenance, service. A key observation by Page and Jenkins is that 'policy bureaucracies are not simply subordinate organizations that merely do as they are told by their political masters' (page vi). The relationship is quite subtle, not command and control based. Bureaucrats are expected to show creativity, to provide procedural or even content solutions, whenever imprecise instructions are given by the top, and this is often the case. They know budgetary details and local ways to do things, they are experts in administrative mechanics, they have a memory of the past, they have information on solutions set up by governments in other countries, etc. They do not just carry out the orders of superiors. In return the latter trust the former and they do not keep a close watch on what happens and what is delivered by the middle ranks.

The final chapter of the book goes back to interpretation and general theory. How is some compatibility achieved inside policy bureaucracies between two principles of order and action such as expertise and hierarchy? Page and Jenkins argue that Whitehall makes use of two basic social arrangements. One is labelled hierarchy on demand. Policy bureaucrats quite often ask their ministers for guidance and steering. At the same time the latter do not continuously command and control their subordinates. In fact political actors rely in many ways on administrative officials. The counterpart of bureaucratic autonomy is bureaucratic creativity.

Another arrangement takes advantage of improvised expertise. Public servants are generalists by training. They do not stay for long in the same job. Nevertheless they acquire skills they transfer from one job to another and that enable them to address a wide variety of issues involved in the policies they handle. Working conditions facilitate learning processes and attention to detail as well as to the broader picture of policymaking. Time pressure and workload are not too tough.

Academics sometimes become too much fascinated by what goes on inside the exclusive circle of elites. They may underestimate the hidden part of the administrative iceberg. They remain prisoners of the idea that by definition bureaucrats are bureaucrats and politicians policymakers. The merit of the book is to question such a posture in a fresh way. Bureaucrats behaving as policymakers are not symptoms of a pathological type of government. They do not always and everywhere act in a technocratic way, imposing vested class interests or annihilating political wills with procedural routines. They may even cooperate with legitimate leaders in mutual confidence. The good news is that, at least in Whitehall, they contribute to the normal running of a pluralistic democracy.

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Lee Marsden, *Lessons from Russia: Clinton and US Democracy Promotion*. Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005, 218 pp. ISBN 0 7546 46106.
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This carefully written account of the evolution of American policy toward Russia during the presidency of Bill Clinton shows more than the author perhaps intends. Drawing on interviews with leading actors, published memoirs and a thorough reading of copious records, it documents how a naively hubristic intention to make Russia democratic ended up with the realistically hubristic goal of 'saving Boris'. It will help anyone interested in American international policy understand what goes on in kitchens where these policies are cooked up and sometimes cocked up.

When Bill Clinton became president on 20 January 1993, he decided that President Boris Yeltsin's government offered an opportunity to turn Russia from a threat to international security to a peace-loving democratic nation. By that time Yeltsin had made the pro-market Yegor Gaidar an ex-prime minister and a veteran of Soviet industry, Viktor Chernomyrdin was starting his five-year tenure. Clinton and Yeltsin struck up an immediate *rapport*. Given their lack of a common language, one wonders what a video of their conversations would reveal as the their basis of bonding. Clinton was willing to overlook Yeltsin's use of troops to settle his dispute with his Congress in October, 1993 and the giveaway of large chunks of natural resources in the loans-for-shares scheme that financed Yeltsin's successful 1996 election campaign, and the diversion of billions of dollars of foreign assistance.

While Yeltsin's actions revealed the shallowness of Clinton's initial hopes, the commitment to Yeltsin was retained on the pragmatic grounds that there was no alternative. The success of neo-Imperialist Vladimir Zhirinovsky in the December, 1993 Duma election and the threat of a Communist victory in the 1996 presidential election gave weight to this argument. It was also applied to Vladimir Putin after he started his first term as president during Clinton's last year in office.

The theoretical framework of the book is a simple distinction between formulating policy goals, the concern of the president, and implementing them, the concern of others. The author could have made more of the fact that in foreign affairs the distinction can involve a disconnection. With the exception of military actions, many foreign policy goals are playing to the grandstand, with little or no expectation that they will or can be implemented.

In Russia the principal measures that Washington could influence involved economic assistance. Thus, the implementation of policy shifted from Clinton's trusted foreign policy advisor, Strobe Talbott, to Larry Summers, who knew where money could be found. The pressure on the IMF to use its funds to support the Yeltsin government was a no-brainer for both American policymakers and intergovernmental agencies, albeit the term had a different meaning on Nineteenth Street than to American officials a few blocks eastward on Pennsylvania Avenue.

As the book's subtitle shows, Marsden is equally concerned with the implementation of democracy promotion policies through such channels as the National Endowment for Democracy. He shows that such policies had little impact on Russian politics and on the federal budget. Neither he nor the Clinton team appeared to confront questions that Russian experts have long wrestled with: Can Russia achieve a democratic system of government? If so, how? Nor does he

confront the answer that Vladimir Putin has given to President Bush, among others: Russia has its own idea of democracy, and it will not take instruction from foreign countries.

The 'realism' that this book documents is a realism rooted in the insider politics of Washington. The author himself reflects this, for no attempt is made to document how Washington's policies looked from inside Moscow's ring roads. The chief lesson that a foreign reader is likely to draw is how easy it is within the inner circle of American politics to make foreign policy without foreigners. That lesson is of continuing importance.

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