

Contradictions Between the Political and Professional Roles of Higher Civil Servants:

Problems in Politically Representative Bureaucracy

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ABSTRACT

In this article the contradictions between the political and professional roles of higher civil servants, inherent to the Finnish administrative culture, are analyzed from both theoretical and empirical viewpoints. In the theoretical part of the article an attempt is made to develop a better conceptual framework through which the problems caused by the politicization of the public administration could be better understood; and through which the main organizational design alternatives and their consequences for securing the political control at the public administration in a society could be identified.

In the empirical part of the article an attempt is made to analyze how Finnish higher civil servants relate themselves to politics, political appointments and political role of higher civil servants. The empirical analyses are based on semi-structured interviews of 38 Finnish top civil servants and a pre-interview survey returned by 39 persons.

Key words: political and professional roles of higher civil servants, representative bureaucracy, politically representative bureaucracy

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Interplay Between Politics and Administration*

In all, or at least in most of the modern western societies *higher civil servants are playing a*

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Matti Mälkiä is responsible on developing the theoretical models discussed in chapter 2; other chapters and the general structure of this article are based on the equal cooperation of both authors.

double role between politics and administration. On the one hand they are the servants of power, operating under the direction and leadership of their respective governments. As servants of power they are supposed to follow the directions given by their political superiors. As servants of power they are the arms of government with the necessary technical and administrative expertise to transform abstract political goals to concrete administrative activities. In this capacity higher civil servants are supposed to help their political superiors in a politically neutral, technical fashion.

On the other hand higher civil servants are also powerful policy makers (cf. e.g. Dogan 1975; Riggs 1987; 1991a)¹. They have both the opportunity and the position to influence the policy-making processes, especially during their early and late stages of preparation. In this process higher civil servants are both important gatekeepers and respected experts. As gatekeepers they control the flow of information going up and down inside the administrative machinery. By selecting the information to be transmitted to their po-

¹ As suggested, for example by Fred W. Riggs (e.g. Riggs 1987; 1991a) higher civil servants may have even more political power (or bureaucratic power, as he calls it) in many of the non-western or developing countries, than they have in western countries. Although this may be true, the following discussion is very much limited to the western condition. This limitation should not be understood to implicate that the authors consider non-western societies as less important targets for scientific study of politics and administration as western societies; or that our theoretical discussion has no importance to non-western countries. Rather, this limitation should be understood as a sign for the limitations of the experiences of the authors. As neither of us are familiar with the nonwestern condition, we decided to limit our focus to the western societies, and not take the risk of overgeneralizing western ideas and conditions to nonwestern countries.

litical superiors higher civil servants are able to influence the knowledge base and values from which the decisions are derived. As experts their opinions are listened, respected and accepted – often even without checking their knowledge or logic of their arguments. Thus, based on their central position in administrative hierarchy, higher civil servants are able to influence, which laws and regulations should be renewed, what policies and policy programs should be developed, and which activities should be funded. They have also an opportunity to influence how new regulations, budgets and policy programs should be implemented through the administrative machinery. This all gives them important political or bureaucratic powers.

During the last several decades the political role of higher civil servants has been continuously analyzed, discussed, and debated (cf. for example Aberbach, Putnam & Rockman 1981; Aberbach, Metzger & Rockman 1991; Farazman 1997). In many of the western countries – for example in Finland – there has been continuous attempts to reform the public administration and to increase its responsiveness to governmental politics. Undoubtedly, there have been many reasons behind this continuous interest, including the strengthening role of governmental activities in almost all areas of society – as exemplified by the emerge and development of the welfare society – and increasing use of systematic policy analysis and designing tools, in order to improve the quality of policy decisions. As a result, the modern state is increasingly complex and the decisions are based more and more on expert knowledge and on complex negotiations between different interest groups and organizations (cf. e.g. Smutter & Lehmbuch 1979; Lehmbuch & Schmitter 1982). As a result the interaction between politics and administration has produced more and more complex manifestations. One of these is the political appointment of higher civil servants.

1.2 Research Problem and Topic

Although in Finnish public administration all higher Civil servants are formally selected on the basis of their technical knowledge, experience and skills, in reality they are selected not only by their technical knowledge but also on the basis of their political sympathies or convictions. This has created a situation where an important part of the Finnish political culture is a system of political appointments, which are used to control the

functioning of the national administrative machinery. During the recent years this system has been considered as problematic, and a reform program (see e.g. Valtioneuvostotyöryhmä 1997) was planned to change the situation. After discussions the suggested reform was cancelled, due to the lack of political agreement.

In this article we *analyze the contradictions between the political and professional roles of higher civil servants, inherent in the Finnish administrative system*. The topic is analyzed from both theoretical and empirical viewpoints.

In the *theoretical level* an attempt is made to develop a conceptual framework through which the problems caused by the politicization of the public administration could be better understood; and through which the main organizational design alternatives and their consequences for securing the political control of the public administration in a society could be identified. In *empirical level* we try to analyze, how Finnish higher civil servants relate themselves to politics, political appointments, and politically oriented public administrators.

From the structural viewpoint the article is divided into two main parts. In the beginning of the paper (chapter 2) we develop two structural models that can be used to increase the political responsiveness of the modern administrative machinery. The model of politically representative bureaucracy (PRB-model) is formed mainly by exaggerating certain tendencies and characteristics of the current Finnish administrative system. The model is based on complete politicization of the administrative system. The assumption is that the complete politicization of the public administration will both increase the legitimacy of the system as perceived by the citizens and increase the political responsiveness of the system as perceived by the political power-holders. In this type of system all civil servants are considered to be political or partially political beings.

An alternative for this system is the Rotation System (RS), which is based on a strict division of labor between political and non-political (or technical) civil servants. The political responsiveness of the administrative system is secured by establishing a small rotating class of politically appointed executives on top of the large non-political or neutral public service. As the non-political public servants are appointed for life the political civil servants are replaced whenever the government or governmental coalitions are changed. They are the political eyes of their superiors.

After analyzing the rationality and some functional dynamics of these models the discussion will later on concentrate on PRB-model. Both the potential strengths and weaknesses of the PRB-model are analyzed. When this is done, it should be stressed that both of these models are intended as weberian ideal types (see e.g. Weber 1978, Chapter 1.1). Both of these models are exaggerations of certain tendencies and characteristics inherent to the existing administrative systems. But, although they are based on the factual situations, they are not supposed to be exact or full descriptions of any existing administrative systems or countries. Their task is to help us to understand the current reality as a deviation from the pure or ideal type situation.

In the second part of the paper (chapter 3) the functionality and the basic rationality of the PRB-model is questioned. This is done on the basis of empirical evidence from Finland. Although the Finnish administrative system has many of the core characteristics of the PRB-model our empirical evidence suggests that many of the Finnish higher civil servants strongly resist the idea and legitimacy of the PRB-model. Their attitudes towards open political appointments and politically appointed civil servants are negative: political appointments are not accepted as justified. Furthermore this is done even by persons who themselves have been appointed on political or partially political grounds.

2 TOWARDS A THEORETICAL MODEL

2.1 *Designing and Redesigning the Administrative Machinery*

In most of the modern western societies the administrative system is based on a firm division of labor between politics and administration, as suggested by scholars like Woodrow Wilson (1887), Frank Goodnow (1900) and many others, especially in the turn of the 19th and 20th century. Based on this line of thinking civil servants are supposed to be responsible for their actions to government, government to parliament, and parliament to people. This general scheme, implemented in most of the western constitutional designs implies that, there is no or that there is only a little room for any independent political action of civil service as a class or civil servants as individual actors. Thus – at least in theory, if not in practice – civil servants are supposed to be apolitical, technical or instrumental actors,

operating strictly under the rule of government.

Nowadays for many of us the above mentioned clear-cut division of labor between politics and administration seems often difficult and sometimes even impossible to understand, achieve and accept. The neat division of labor between politics and administration does not work anymore – if in deed it has ever worked. This is due to at least two interrelated characteristics, which are considered to be more and more crucial to the functioning of the democratic political system as a whole: First, the increasing interplay – i.e. complex, multidimensional interaction – between politics and administration among the highest echelons of civil service, documented in many of the recent studies (cf. e.g. Dogan 1975; Aberbach, Putnam & Rockman 1981); and secondly, the lessening ability of the political power-holders to lead and control the functioning of large and complex national administrative machineries.

To regain the desired balance of power, there is a need to increase the political control over the administrative machinery. As this problem has been recognized, there has been a growing need to redesign and reorganize the constitutional settings to overcome this lack of control.

In different countries, in different political, cultural, and economic (etc.) situations, different responses – and, more often, different mixtures of such – have been developed to cope with this general problem. These responses include various types of attempts to:

- 1) *re-establish the traditional division of labor between politics and administration in society*²;
- 2) *develop completely new or modified forms of division of labor between politics and administration*³, and

² This can be done for example by: (a) increasing the professionalization and developing professional Codes of Ethics or (b) increasing legalization and developing general administrative principles to govern the behavior of civil servants; by (c) increasing the role and functions of politically appointed committees, like ministerial and parliamentary commissions inside the policy formulation processes – and thus decreasing the role and importance of the higher civil servants in these processes; and by (d) establishing boards of directors from politicians, to govern and control the public administration, and to make sure that it is operating under the directions approved by the government and the parliament.

³ This can be done for example by suggesting, that the higher civil servants should focus on facts and technical aspects of policy, while politicians should focus on preferences and interests (cf. Aberbach, Putnam & Rockman 1981, Image II relationships between the politics and administration); or suggest-

- 3) *politicize* the whole or parts of the *administrative machinery*, in order to increase the political control over its activities.

When the latter choice is made, there are at least two major alternatives. The politicization of civil service can be achieved either by establishing:

- a) a *rotation system* – this is: by establishing a rotating class of politically appointed executives on top of the non-political or neutral public service; their task is to lead and govern the administrative machinery towards the directions given by the current government; this class of politically appointed officials is open to be replaced at will, when the government is changed – or by
- b) a *complete politicization of public administration* – i.e. by politicizing the whole administrative machinery, so that it would more or less resemble the total balance of political opinions in a society; to be justified, for example, by the ideals and beliefs of the concept of politically representative bureaucracy, described in the next chapter.

In this article we are discussing mainly about the last mentioned response to the control problem, analyzing some of its ideological and practical justifications, as well as its strengths and its weaknesses. And finally expressing some serious doubts against its ability to overcome the problems caused by the lack of political control over the civil service as a whole. The empirical analysis is based on the case of Finland.

2.2 PRB-Model: Ideological Justifications for a Complete Politicization of Public Administration

2.2.1 Representative Bureaucracy

The idea or model of politically representative bureaucracy (the PRB-model), to be discussed

later on, is closely related with, and sometimes even influenced by the well-known discussion about the *representative bureaucracy*. From this viewpoint we can also find the most, or one of the most, believable ideological justifications for the complete politicization of public administration. A set of more practical justifications is discussed later on.

The concept of representative bureaucracy was first taken under serious scholarly discussion in 1944 by J. Donald Kingsley in his book "*Representative Bureaucracy*". Since then his lead has been followed by a score of scholars including Norton Long (1952), Paul Van Riper (1958), V. Subramaniam (1967), Frederick C. Mosher (1968), Kenneth J. Meier with Lloyd G. Nigro (1976), and G. B. Sharma (1981), among others.

From our viewpoint, especially two of the basic theoretical assumptions behind the main body of this discussion are of interest. They can be summarized as follows:

- 1) the more representative the civil service is to the social structure of the society – in terms of ethnic, linguistic, social class, caste, and sex (etc.) background – the more responsive and responsible the civil service is to the general needs and interests of that society; and
- 2) the more representative the civil service is to the social structure of the society, the more acceptable and justified its actions are on the eyes of the population in question.

The first of these assumptions can be called as the *responsiveness assumption*; and the second can be called the *legitimacy assumption*.⁴ Although both of these assumptions seem to be rather well accepted in the Public Administration literature, there is not much empirical evidence for or against either of them. For example the assumption, that the social background will influence one's behavior in public office is described as "plausible, but ambiguous and unsubstantiated" (Putnam 1967, 41).

ing that politicians should focus on articulating the broad and diffuse interests in society, while civil servants should mediate the more narrowly focused interests of organized clienteles (cf. Aberbach, Putnam & Rockman 1981; image III). Both of these alternatives can be understood – not just as models of how politicians and civil servants consider the division of labour between themselves to be realized – but also as models on the basis of which the roles of politicians and civil servants should be formally differentiated, as acceptable modes of behavior.

⁴ A third important theme for the discussion on representative bureaucracy is the assumption, that by hiring members of the minority groups, the civil service will also provide means of economic advancement for members of the minority communities. This type of reasoning is used for example to justify the U.S. affirmative action policy.

2.2.2 Politically Representative Bureaucracy

On similar grounds, as with the case of representative bureaucracy in general, it can be claimed that *in a truly democratic society, the civil service should represent the political opinions of the society as a whole*. From this perspective, it is not so important whether the civil service is representative to the society in terms of ethnic, linguistic, sex, caste, or social class background, but that the civil service is representative to the society in terms of its political opinions and party affiliations. To be more specific, it can be claimed, that in a truly democratic society all civil servants – or at least all higher civil servants – should be selected according to political criteria, so that as a group, they would represent proportionally all major political forces, represented either in society or in parliament.

The fundamental assumption behind this type of argumentation is that as the political process is always bound to be influenced by civil servants, and as this influence is difficult (or impossible) to overcome with any available means, the inherently political nature of all public actions should be recognized, and civil service should be openly politicized and organized in the form of miniature parliament. *This type of bureaucracy would then be responsive to the interests and needs of the society as a whole (cf. the responsiveness assumption); and the actions taken by this type of bureaucracy would be accepted as justified by the population, in much the similar fashion as the actions of the parliament and government are accepted (cf. the legitimacy assumption).*

Ideally and, at least, in practice, the complete independence of this openly politicized system – against the dysfunctional governmental pressures for example – is guaranteed by *appointing officials for life*. This gives them the kind of autonomy as with justices in most American and European courts, and resembles strongly the way in which weberian bureaucracy is structured. To appoint civil servants for life is used to guarantee that the system will not be corrupted as a spoils system. This resolves also many of the problems associated with a rotation system, especially during the periods, when changes in government are made, and a new set of rotated officials are just learning the trades of government.

The operation of the politically representative bureaucracy can further be enforced by using *collective forms of decision-making and teamwork*. As all important political opinions are represented inside the public administration, they all

can be taken into consideration even during the earliest stages of policy formation and even at the latest stages of its implementation.

Finally we can ask: Can civil servants be appointed purely on the basis of their political opinions? Can the system survive without the technical competence? Here our answer is clearly negative. Even PRB-model requires technically competent civil servants. Otherwise the system would brake down or become enormously inefficient. Thus all civil servants are selected *not only by their political lineage but also by their technical competence*.

Based on the earlier discussion we can conclude that a bureaucracy structured according to this general model – i.e. a bureaucracy where:

- 1) all (or most of the) civil servants are appointed for life; and where
- 2) all civil servants – or at least all or most of the higher civil servants – are selected according to both professional and political criteria, so that as a group, they would represent proportionally all major political forces, represented either in society or in parliament, is called here as a *politically representative bureaucracy (PRB)*. What we have in our mind is a weberian ideal or pure type (cf. Weber 1978, Chapter 1.1). In practice this model is developed by exaggerating certain internal tendencies, characteristics and discussions inherent to the current Finnish administrative system. Because of this also the further analysis is largely based on the case of Finland, where this type of system seems to be fairly well developed – at least in practice, if not in theory.

2.3 PRB-Model as Compared to Rotation System: Some Practical Justifications for the PRB-model

Along with the before mentioned ideological justifications, PRB-model can be justified also from a practical point of view. In fact, this may be even more important type of justifications than the ideological ones. For example, in countries like Finland, the PRB-model can often be best understood as a practical alternative for a rotation system. From this perspective PRB-model can be seen as a response which country is forced to accept, when a rotation system is not available, or when it is difficult to implement, because of certain economic, social and/or cultural conditions.

Based on the contextual approach we can argue that *PRB-model is a suitable alternative for rotation system especially in three types of situations:*

- 1) in *smaller countries* as opposed to larger ones⁵,
- 2) in *countries with several important political parties* as opposed to 1- or 2-party systems, and
- 3) in *countries with short and unpredictable terms of government* as opposed to countries with long and predictable (e.g. fixed) terms of government.

All these cases are quite understandable. For example, a system of rotating officials requires a large pool of qualified persons, to be able and willing to take over the office, when changes are made in government. For us, it seems to be quite reasonable to assume, that in larger countries – especially with federal system – there is a larger pool or potential persons available, to draw and drop the highest civil servants. On the other hand, in *smaller countries* – like in Finland and Sweden – the problem is, that *there are only few suitable areas in society, from which these rotating civil servants could be drawn and where they could retire*, when their term in office is over. Furthermore, the question with size of the country is even more obvious, as we keep in our mind, that the number of utmost top civil servants – to be included in the rotation – does not correlate with the size of the population. In smaller countries there is probably proportionally much higher civil servants (as compared to the size of population) as in larger countries.

On the other hand the question is not just about the size of the pool of potential persons to be taken into the upper echelons of civil service, but also of their quality. We must always ask, *are these potential officials competent enough to operate as higher civil servants*. Again – we claim – the larger the size of the country, the more opportunities there are to learn to understand the how's and why's of the government. In smaller countries, this is not easily done. To take an example, in Finland the question is: could a leftist Labor Union officer or a newspaper man (these are among the most important areas of society, where leftist politicians are drawn, in Finland), take charge of important governmental opera-

tions, as a high level ministerial officer? Could s/he cope with the questions of modern public administration? Has s/he good enough qualifications to be able to succeed in her office? Or – in the case of non-socialist parties – could a member of an agrarian or industrial interest organization or a business executive do it? Would s/he be even willing to try?

And *thirdly*, even if the potential persons are available and if they are competent enough, there is still at least one important question: *would they be willing to leave their old jobs, and take a temporary position as a public official?* Would they be willing to do it even if the probable term of government is short or unknown? Thus we come to the question of the term of government. For example in Finland, the terms of government used to be rather short in 1960's and 1970's. In 1960's there were as many as 7 different governments and in 1970's there were even more – 11 different governments. This means that in 1970's the average term of government in Finland was about one year. Although many of these governments were based on the same or almost same governmental coalition, the risk of losing ones position quickly and suddenly was clearly a risk. Thus it would have been difficult to institute a rotation system.

During the 1980's and 1990's the situation has changed in Finland. Nowadays governmental coalitions seem to be more stable and stay in power longer periods. This is clear when we look at the last four governments (since 1983 to present). The first three governments have all stayed in power 4 years – i.e. the whole term between 2 parliamentary elections. In Finland, at least this far, this has been the maximum term of government. (Noussainen 1992, 250–251.) It seems also highly likely that the current government will be able to do the same – there are only few months to the next elections to be held early 1999.

2.4 Strengths and Weaknesses of the PRB-Model Strengths

2.4.1 Strengths

Along the ideological justifications, *the biggest strength for the PRB model is the fact that by using it, it is possible to avoid many of the problems typical to a rotation system*. Some of the most notable of these problems are associated with the early and last stages of the term of government. For example in USA, were the term of

⁵ Size of country counted by the size of its population; and assuming that the portion of higher educated citizens is constant.

government is fixed – it is the same as the term of the president (as the president is the head of government) – the change of government is often traumatic. During the first few months, hardly anything can be done. This is the time, when newly appointed political officials are just trying to learn their job. During this stage also the new president is still unsure of his policies, so it is a time to explore and experiment, to learn the trades of the government.

Another similarly traumatic period, typical to the countries with fixed term of government and a rotation system, begins a little before the end of the term of the government. This is a time, when many of the most competent civil servants are leaving the ship. For them, this is the time to take another office. This is the time when they are most able to get a good position for next several years. Thus when many of the most crucial members of the administration are replaced, the system is coping but not seeking new avenues to explore, or new policies to develop.

In the PRB model this kind of problems should not be present – not at least as much as they are common to the rotation system. The fixed set of civil servants is always available. And if there is a question, that some of the officials are mistrusted, the problem can be, at least partially, avoided by changing the internal division of labor inside of the organization. After this is done, the mistrusted persons can be placed in charge of politically less sensitive issues. At the same time, the most trusted civil servants may be placed in charge of all or most of the more politically sensitive issues.

2.4.2 Weaknesses

What are then the weaknesses of the politically representative bureaucracy? On the basis of the Finnish discussion on the topic, the most important weaknesses of the PRB model seems to be associated with the (1) competence and (2) loyalty of the politically appointed civil servants, and the (3) internal integrity (or governability) of the system.

Question of Competence

At least in Finland, the competence of politically appointed civil servants is often questioned. The typical assumption is that if appointments are made on political or partially political grounds, it means that professional (or technical) competence is displaced with a political suitability. Or

moreover: incompetent people are appointed instead of competent ones.

This type of selection on behalf of the appointing person or body, is of course a possibility, and a grave danger for the PRB system as a whole. It may also be true, that inside the model, there is a tendency to overplay the importance of political criteria. But still, it is hardly true that “if you give a finger to politics, it will take your whole arm”. And, in our opinion, this is the kind of reasoning, on which this type of claim is mainly based. In reality the question is how to balance both professional and political requirements. If both of these criteria are used, the selected person should be both professionally competent and politically suitable to the task in question. Thus, although much discussed in newspapers and popular literature, *the question of competence is hardly the most critical key weakness of the PRB-model.*

Question of Loyalty

The second question is about the loyalty of the politically appointed civil servants. At least in Finland, this is also often discussed (cf. Merikoski 1968; Hannus 1979; Laine 1993). Two general types of questions seems to be frequently asked:

The first set of questions asks, whether politically appointed civil servants are loyal to their superiors, either political or professional? Are they willing to work with persons having different political opinions? Are they willing to work, for example, under a minister or supervisor who is a member of another political party?

A second set of questions is more complex: To whom politically appointed civil servants are really loyal and how does this affect their work? Are they loyal to the political party (or parties), that supported their selection? Are they loyal to the organizations they are working for? Or are they loyal to their professional Codes of Ethic?

Although the basic question here seems to be, can these persons be trusted, we believe, that the real problem is, whom should civil servants (both political and apolitical) be loyal to? *The problem with loyalty is that, in a politically representative bureaucracy, a politically appointed person may have mixed signals – or rather more mixed signals than non-political civil servants – about the expectations directed towards him or her. And if these mixed signals are not corrected – e.g. by clarifying the role and expectations civil servants are supposed to have inside the system – this ambiguity becomes a grave systematic*

ic danger for the system structured according to PRB-model.

On the other hand, we should not kid ourselves to believe that the question of loyalty could be easily solved in any type of civil service system. For most systems it is always an important problem to be discussed and to be solved.⁶

Question of Internal Integrity of the System

This question, as we understand it, is closely related to the question of loyalty. The claim, often cited in heated discussions about the merits and demerits of the politically representative bureaucracy, is that, by using political appointments, the functioning of the traditional, hierarchically organized civil service is undermined. In a sense, a kind of informally organized system of hidden power and informal functional authority is created.

Along with open politicization, the contradictions on values and views are introduced to the daily operations of the organization. During the times of heated political discussion, the politicization of the public administration may create a set of informal groups, organized around the political lineage of their members. More time than is useful may be used to internal battles between these groups, causing needs of secrecy, and pulling groups and individuals apart. All these tendencies may undermine the internal integrity of the system, to create a kind of over-politicized organization, discussed for example by Henry Mintzberg (1983; 1989, chapter 13) – one of the leading authors on organizational science and organization design.

We believe that this possibility is by far the strongest argument against the PRB-model.

3 EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE ON THE FUNCTIONING OF THE MODEL

3.1 *The Finnish System: Some Background Information*

The political nature of the Finnish civil service has been analyzed in several studies. Many of these have tried to identify the political background of the higher civil servants and the ways in which higher civil servants have been appoint-

ed to their positions. This has been studied for example by Pekka Väänänen (1982), Krister Ståhlberg (1986), Klaus af Ursin and Juha Vartola (1987) and Jarmo Laine (1993).

Since the early 1960's the Finnish Civil Service has been developed more and more towards the direction of PRB model. There is no rotation system in the sense, that changes in government would be accompanied by changes in the leadership of the agencies. Almost all public administrators – excluding the ministers and their political secretaries and just a handful of other officers – are appointed for life. Formally civil servants are appointed by pure merit criteria: By the letter of law, civil servants are appointed on the basis of their experience, education, and supposed competence for the position in question. But mostly, this is only in theory. In fact, almost all higher civil servants are selected not only by the merit criteria, but also by political or partially political criteria. For example according to the calculations of Jarmo Laine (1993) all higher appointments made in 1980's and early 1990's, have been based, at least, partially on political criteria.

Thus, the political criteria are used to select the suitable officials. This fact is also generally recognized, although not necessarily accepted. The problem here seems to be twofold:

First, it can be claimed that the political appointments are not well suited to the traditional Finnish legal administrative culture. The Finnish administrative system has been based strongly on the northern European legalist tradition, which in the case of Finland – because of historical reasons – may be even stronger stressed than it is for example in Sweden or in Germany (for more information see e.g. Tiihonen & Ylikangas 1993).

The second problem is that the system of political appointments is based mainly on informal practices, not on the clear letter of the law. As only some of the reasons behind the selection are publicized, and as all appointments are made both on political and professional grounds, the exact nature and width of the politicization is difficult to uncover. The system is fuzzy. It may be difficult for even to a person himself to know, according what kind of criteria s/he was appointed by.

3.2 *Empirical Data*

In the next few pages we try to analyze, on the basis of empirical evidence, how the politicization of public administration – as a key element for the PRB-model – works in practice. Our em-

⁶ For a more thorough discussion of this see e.g. Ridley (1981).

Table 1. The Five basic responses towards politics, political appointments and the political role of higher civil servants.

Basic response	Description (with ideal type expression of this opinion)
1) <i>Denial</i>	"There are many politically appointed civil servants in Finland, but I am not one of them" (personal denial) "There are many politically appointed civil servants in Finland, but we don't have them here at our ministry/department" (organizational denial)
2) <i>Withdrawal</i>	"I used to be a political civil servant (during the times when I was appointed), but I am no longer – I have withdrawn from politics"
3) <i>Adaptation to a Professional Role</i>	"I may have political opinions, and I may have been partially appointed because of them, but what I really am is a professional"
4) <i>Becoming a Colleague</i>	"I am working with politicians in a somewhat collegial relationships: we both influence the policy process, but have different points of view"
5) <i>Being a Politician</i>	"This kind of civil servant is actively participating the policy processes. If s/he is unsatisfied with the decisions made by his minister, s/he will contact someone else at the Council of State." (always someone else)

irical data is based on both a set of extensive interviews and a pre-interview survey. A total of 38 Finnish higher civil servants were interviewed and 39 persons returned a related survey. The respondents included nearly one half of the utmost top civil servants of the country – including administrative heads of ministries, heads of divisions and heads of subdivisions.

The empirical material was originally collected for a research project, directed by professor Juha Vartola, which aims to describe, what kind of persons the utmost elite of the Finnish state administrators are, what kind of career they have had, how they get things done at their ministries, and to what directions they consider that public administration should be developed in near future in Finland.

The data was collected during 1993. The interviews were done by 7 different persons, including Jari Stenvall. All interviews were based on written questions that were delivered beforehand to the civil servants, so that they could be prepared for the interview. Furthermore, all interviews were recorded and later on the data was typewritten.

What we are interested here is the basic attitudes of the Finnish higher civil servants towards politics, political appointments, and political role of higher civil servants, as a whole. During the following analysis – we want to point out – we are not so much analyzing, how the interplay between politics and administration is actually happening in Finnish central administration. In a sense, we believe that our empirical findings describe more of the attitudes and beliefs (the oughts) of the highest civil servant towards poli-

tics, than the actual accounts of the situation. This conclusion was reached as we found out several inconsistencies and differences between this data and the earlier research; and as we found out the hidden overtones of our data.

3.3 Main Result: Five Basic Responses to Politics

According our analysis, there seems to be five general ways to associate oneself towards politics, political appointments, and the political role of higher civil servants. These basic types of responses are summarized in table 1, and they are categorized as:

- 1) denial,
- 2) withdrawal,
- 3) adaption to a professional role,
- 4) becoming a colleague, and
- 5) being a politician.

3.3.1 Type 1: Denial

According to this first type of attitudes, higher civil servants denied completely, that they could have been appointed to their office on political or even partially political grounds. At the similar fashion they denied, that they could be rightfully characterized as "political", or as "politically active" civil servants. On the contrary, they considered themselves as non-political or uncommitted, and were proud of it.

Sometimes this kind of denial took a personal form: The general claim was made, that there are – “of course” – a lot of politically appointed civil servants in Finland, but in no case the person in question should be considered as one. One even claimed, that if his real political opinions would have been known to the decision-makers, s/he would not have been appointed at all.”

Sometimes the denial took not a personal but an organizational form. According to this type of argument, there are a lot of politically appointed civil servants in Finland, but not many at ones own ministry, or at ones own department. For example one civil servant said that:

“There are only few politically appointed civil servants in our ministry. But I know ministries where the influence of politically appointed civil servants is very strong.”

This type of comment reflects the attitude, that things are rather well in ones own ministry, as there are only few politically appointed civil servants there. The implication, of course, is that as thing are well in ones own organization they are a whole lot worse elsewhere.

So, what does this type of response really signify? As we have earlier said one of most important characteristics of a politically representative bureaucracy, like the case of Finland, is that all or at least most of the higher civil servants are selected according to both political and professional criteria. This tendency is general in the ministries of Finland. So – as this is the case – we can assume, that what ever the respondents said at the interviews about their own appointment (etc.) most of them must have been appointed at least partially by political criteria. It is extremely rare that any person would be appointed at this level, without major political considerations.

Of course, not all of the interviewed civil servants have been appointed by political reasons. There are always exceptions. For example, there may have been no suitable persons available, either in terms of education or in terms of political leaning. Or the major political parties may have disagreed on which one of them should get the position in question. So, it is really possible that a non-committed (non-political) civil servant could have been selected as a compromise. Never the less, the pure number of these kind of statements and the disapproving tone in which they were often made, suggests that the question is more about wishful thinking, or about unwillingness to accept the role of politics, than the fact that so many persons are really appointed

without political reasons. Thus the political appointments seemed to be denied, as many of the higher civil servants seems to consider them as unethical, unmoral or unwise.

Generally the finding that there are a lot of higher civil servants in Finland, that do not accept political appointments, is not new. For example in a large survey reported by Juha Vartola and Klaus af Ursin (1987, appendix 3, page 13), as many as 73 % of the civil servants (N=1.386) considered that political appointments are happening much too often. According the same research 35 % agreed with the concept of politically representative bureaucracy as a goal for civil service; 32 % of them disagreed and rest didn't have any opinions towards either of the sides. So, in spite of the fact, that political appointments are more a rule than exception, civil servants have not yet been willing to accept that criteria as a justified way to select civil servants.

3.3.2 Other Forms to Downplay the Role and Functions of Political Appointments

There were also some other ways to downplay the importance of political appointments. Sometimes the existence of political criteria was accepted, but its importance was questioned. The claim was for example that:

“According to my experience the political criteria affect always the recruitment of higher civil servants.”

Actually, as we understand it, this claim is almost exactly true. At least it is clearly in accordance with the calculations of Jarmo Laine (1993). But depending on the context it can also be used to downplay the role of political appointments.

Another possible way to downplay the importance of political appointments is the claim, that they are less frequently done nowadays than earlier. Many civil servants expressed the opinion, that the political aspects used to affected appointments especially during 1970's and 1980's, but not so much any more. During those decades the political activity was very high in all areas of the Finnish society.

What makes these claims clearly questionable is, that according to the calculations of Jarmo Laine (1993), there has not been any changes of this sort. Maybe also this question is more about wishful thinking; or maybe the question is about how openly these appointments are and how much they are discussed afterward. This was suggested by some of the respondents. For example:

"I suppose, that the number of political appointments has decreased. However there are even nowadays a lot of politically appointed civil servant. And there are also a lot of new political appointments. But they are made in a much more invisible or unpublicized ways than they used to be done earlier."

Maybe the political culture is really changing. Or maybe the political appointments are becoming more and more accepted by the higher civil servants.

3.3.3 Type 2: Withdrawal

The second type of response towards politics, political appointments, and political role of civil servants is based on the confession that the person in question used to be a politically appointed and/or politically active civil servant. This was for example when s/he was appointed to his current position. But afterwards s/he has withdrawn from politics, and should no longer be considered as a political civil servant. In a sense, the person has been reformed:

"I have been in politics. I have been a member of an expert unit of my political party, where I used to be very active. But nowadays I'm no longer interested in working for my party."

"The politics is past and gone for me, so I have nothing to do with it in my private life."

Also in this case, the basic orientation towards politics seems to be based on the assumption that there is something shameful for higher civil servants to be active in politics. Sometimes the claim is made almost in the form of a confession, like "I used to be a bad person, but nowadays I am reformed". This change of heart can be explained for example as follows:

"It is very difficult to work as a higher civil servant if you are active in politics. This is due to the nature of the duties of higher civil servants. It makes it very difficult to commit oneself to any kind of policies of a certain political party."

To strengthen the point, it was almost surprising to find out, that among those higher civil servants that confessed ever being active in politics, almost all said that they are nowadays politically inactive. They may still have their political connections and they are still following what happens in politics, but they are no longer personally involved. Actually, almost all higher civil servants told in interviews that they are closely following what happens in politics.

This was hardly a surprise. And neither is it a surprise that many higher civil servants think that

political competence is a part of their qualifications. This is, of course, natural because they are so close working with ministers. Even though they are not taking active role in politics, they must understand how things are done in political sphere of life. Some earlier studies, like Vartola and af Ursin (1987), have found out that especially the political committed civil servants tend to emphasize the importance of political competence. In our data this was not always the case. There were also many non-political civil servants who considered it of utmost importance for higher civil servants to have political competence.

3.3.4 Type 3: Adaptation to a Professional Role

A third type of basic response towards politics, political appointments and political role of higher civil servants is closely related with the withdrawal. According to this type of opinion, no strong distinctions between political and professional roles of civil servants were made. Politics was accepted as a form of life, but considered clearly as of secondary importance.

A kind of classical assumption in this category, seems to be based on the assumption, that "yes, I may have political opinions, and yes, I may have been partially appointed because of them, but what I really am is a professional civil servant". This general idea was expressed for example as follows:

"I think that I'm primarily an expert. However I don't deny that I have political commitments and that I was selected according to political criteria."

"My earlier experience of politics reflect the process through which I was selected to this office. But even so, I consider myself both suitable and competent for the office."

So, the role of politics, according to this categorization is accepted, but considered as of secondary importance. The role of politics is no longer denied, but rather it is put into the order. The division of labor between politics and administration seems to follow the traditional categorizations. These opinions seems to reflect the most common viewpoints in our data: that politicians make policy while civil servants administer it (cf. Aberbach, Putnam & Rockman 1981; Image 1); or that politicians make choices while civil servants present options (cf. Aberbach, Putnam & Rockman 1981; Image 2). Civil servants are in the role of executives and advisers in their relation to politics. And this makes them to be more as instrument than active participants in policy

formation. According to many civil servants these kind of division of labor seems to be also the one criterion of good ethics in administration. In ministries the rule is that civil servants must be loyal to their own minister.

3.3.5 Type 4: *Becoming a Colleague*

According to the fourth response towards politics, political appointments and political role of higher civil servants higher civil servants should consider themselves as collaborators than subordinates to politicians. The assumption is that both politicians and civil servants are working together as a group or as a team. The dividing line between politics and administration is fuzzy. How the division of labor is organized remains unsaid. The important question here is that the different parties are working together, without clear hierarchical relationships. The division of labor is not based on the traditional roles between the superior and subordinate, but between the collaborators in a common endeavor.

In our material this kind of assumption was rarely expressed, even though it seems to be quite closely related to the concept of politically representative bureaucracy. One of the few explanations of this sort was as follows:

“Earlier, there used to be a lot of politicians, who excepted that civil servants work unambiguously according to their orders. These kinds of politicians are now pensioners. Nowadays politicians are more active. They express their wishes and remarks straight a way if there is something that they don't like.”

Also a more active role is expected from the higher civil servants according to this set of beliefs. Even a lobbying is accepted and sometimes even required. This is, for example, the case when there is a need to open the eyes of ones own minister. This can and should be done, but only if the issue is really important.

An interesting opinion of this sort was expressed by a one higher civil servant. According him the Code of Ethics may even require, that professional civil servant takes a different opinion than the politician:

“The higher civil servants have responsibility of an official to act in the role of an expert. This means that sometimes it is their duty to interfere issues or represent opinions, which are not accepted by politicians. In those situation civil servants must have good arguments and good knowledge about the issues.”

But nevertheless, they must not keep their mouths shut, until afterwards. When the decision is made, the issue is settled.

3.3.6 Type 5: *Being a Politician*

The last type of relationship towards the politics, political appointments, and active political role of civil servants, is that of an active political operator. According to this opinion, civil servants should be active to participate in the policy processes. And if s/he is unsatisfied with the decisions made by his minister, s/he can (or even should) contact someone higher up, for example at the Council of State, to lobby and inform about his opinions.

The most interesting point here is that this kind of model is never used to describe oneself. This type of model is always used to describe others – namely politically appointed civil servants. According to our understanding, this can only be seen as a clear sign, that this type of relationship between politics and administration is not accepted by the highest Finnish civil servants. It is something that a good civil servant should never do, but may be often done by bad apples of the service.

As a kind of political actor, civil servants may have important, informal power in public administration. For instance they may become trustees of their political superiors, with the same political leaning. As trustees, they may then be assigned to prepare, formulate or reformulate a policy (etc.) sometimes in secrecy, so that other parties will not find out what type of policy is under the preparation. According to our respondents, this type of work was quite typical in earlier days, when: “There was the time when mysterious civil servants walked in corridors of ministries. They had got secret missions from their minister.”

According to the higher civil servants, political civil servants may have loyalty problems. This may happen especially if a political civil servant is a member of a different party than the minister of his office. This is very common situation in politically representative bureaucracy because civil servants are typically appointed for life.

Even though these loyalty problems were recognized, our respondents were not unanimous. There are contradictions in opinions among higher civil servants, on how typical the loyalty problems of political civil servants are. Some civil servants claimed that:

“There are some political civil servants who lobby against their ministers. They may give information for their political parties in order to seek support to their viewpoints.”

On the other hand some other civil servants believed that political civil servants have often good ethics. They don't lobby against their ministers more often than any other civil servants – suggesting that lobbying is not the exclusive right of political civil servants.

4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

4.1 Contradictions between the Political and Professional Roles in PRB: A Summary

On the basis of our earlier discussions we can make the following conclusions:

1. *As higher civil servants the respondents had two different roles: The role of political civil servant and the role of professional. These roles seem to be difficult to combine.* For instance it may be difficult for a civil servant to be at the same time loyal to his party and to be loyal to his ministry. *This contradiction between the professional and political role of civil servant is one of the biggest systemic problems of the politically representative bureaucracy.*

2. As we have already indicated, at least most of the respondents have been appointed on the basis of their political opinions and political activity. But as they describe their relations to politics, they seem to emphasize the traditional, non-political, or professional ideals for a civil servant. They had also a strong tendency to deny or downplay their own status as a politically committed or politically appointed official. *This indicates clearly, that the political role, rather than the professional role is the problem.*

3. *The contradictions between the political and professional roles are settled often, by a complete withdrawal from the political role.* The material suggests strongly that there is this kind of developmental logic between political and professional roles. The higher civil servants describe themselves strongly in terms of professional or expert role. Like US retainers, little by little, they withdraw themselves from politics.

4. *By becoming professionals higher civil servants do not loose their actual power inside the policy process.* They may even gain it. Rather the form of power and the use of power are changed. And maybe, it is no longer considered as political, but as professional power. As many of them pointed out, nothing is more powerful than a non-political expert: It is difficult to argue against experts, with clear and well-founded opinions.

5. Even though the civil servants obviously have a lot of power to influence the politics, the existence of this power is strongly denied. So the result is: *As experts, the higher civil servants are bound to be able to influence politicians. But as loyal professional civil servants they deny, that they are actually using this kind of influence. Just the "other", the "bad" civil servants are walking in the shady arenas of power and politics.* Loyal civil servant does not do that. On the contrary, the loyal civil servants, like respondents themselves, make a strong conceptual division between politics and administration, and try to limit their role to the areas of administration.

This conclusion is also partially based and supported by some results of the survey section. In the survey section, higher civil servants were asked to evaluate how much the higher civil servants have influence on politics in Finland. The question was asked so as to open a kind of comparative perspective: "In some countries, higher civil servants have extremely much influence to politics, in some other countries, this influence is small. What is your opinion, what kind of influence higher civil servants have on politics in Finland?" The respondents had 5 alternatives, organized into a scale, from 1 (=extremely high influence) to 5 (=extremely small influence).

According the results, most of the higher civil servants – 28 out of 38 (74 %) – considered that, in Finland, higher civil servants have rather high influence on politics. 2 of them considered that they have extremely high influence. Only 3 of the respondents considered that higher civil servants have rather small influence on politics, and none considered that the higher civil servants have extremely small influence. *So, in terms of influence to politics and from a comparative perspective, higher civil servants seemed to consider themselves as a group of rather high influence. There was nothing to suggest that they are not powerful policy makers.*

Furthermore, 23 of the respondents considered that in recent future this influence will stay as it was at the 1993. 10 of them considered that the influence will increase, and only 5 of them considered that the influence is going down.

6. *Partially the withdrawal from political to professional role seems to be caused by the pressures inside the bureaucracy.* The political activity seems not to be accepted by the supporters of the traditional, legalistic administrative culture. On the other hand the professional expertise is valued, and considered to be important. *So by becoming non-political professionals – or by see-*

ing themselves as such – higher civil servants fit better to the well-accepted picture.

7. On the other hand *this withdrawal may be also seen as a tactical stance. By stressing the professional role, higher civil servants are able to work with everyone. If their advice is considered as “professional”, as opposed to “political”, the recommendations they initiate and support, may be better accepted.* On the other hand, if they would be considered as political, their actions could be easily suspected.

8. *A third possibility to this withdrawal, not much discussed by our respondents, is that by becoming higher civil servants, and becoming a part of the top-level policymaking system, they start to see themselves as above politicians.* In a sense, they may start to see themselves as kind of modern mandarins, based on the professional expertise, and the fact that they are appointed for life.

As a conclusion for the whole empirical analysis, the PRB-model, as applied in northern Scandinavia, seems to have important systemic problems. Because of the professionalization of the higher civil servants, the political control of the bureaucracy – the main objective of the PRB-model – becomes more and more difficult to achieve. As such this model becomes less and less suitable for the task it has been developed for.

4.2 Conclusion and an Invitation

In this paper we have tried to take some necessary first steps towards describing and analyzing the functioning, justifications, strengths and weaknesses of a politically representative bureaucracy, as illustrated with a set of empirical material taken from the case of Finland.

As a conclusion, and as an invitation, we try to formulate some of our ideas as to which direction this type of analysis should be developed further. According to our believe, especially three notions are important.

1. First of all, the studies on the functioning of the politically representative bureaucracy should be based on similar kind of *systems or design orientation* as we have used here. The important task for further studies – according to our opinion – is to develop a better understanding on the nature, role, justifications, conditions, strengths, weaknesses, systemic properties, and inner functioning of the politically representative bureaucracy. We need to know why this response is developed, how it is used, what are its strengths and what are its weaknesses.

2. *To understand the nature of this one response (to a certain set of problems), we must also understand its alternatives.* To truly understand how PRB model is working, we must not limit our inquiry to just this one model. We must also understand the nature and functioning of other – alternative responses to the same or similar demands. To be more specific, according to our opinion, we must understand especially the nature, role, and functioning (etc.) of the rotation system.

3. Thirdly, we believe that further studies should be based on both theoretical analysis (i.e. theoretical modelling) and empirical data. This data should be collected, if possible, in a comparative form or in a *comparativistic framework*. It is not enough to understand how this kind of system is working in one country, like in Finland. But to develop a truly international science of Public Administration, we must not limit ourselves to a one country. As Fred W. Riggs has said:

“In global world system we need to develop frameworks and theories for the study of *Public Administration* that are truly universal in scope (...). Such a framework will be nomothetic, focusing on explanatory theories that account for the continuously changing properties and problems faced by governments as they seek to implement public policies. Its normative guidelines will be anchored in empirical knowledge of the institutions and dynamics of any society in which they are employed. In such a perspective, it will become increasingly possible to use comparative methods to understand *American* (read any, addition by MM&JS) public administration in a global framework, and to find better solutions to its problems.” (Riggs 1991b.)

* * *

As an addition to what we have discussed earlier in this article, at least one important question was left intact. As we have seen the legitimacy of the political appointments and political role of higher civil servants – and thus the legitimacy of the politically representative bureaucracy – has been clearly questioned in Finland. As a last remark for this article, we want to point out one potential explanation: Maybe the problem is with how higher civil servants understood politics? Political appointments may have been understood as a sign for the spoils system rather than an acceptable attempt to direct and control the civil service. As a spoils system, politics may be understood as negative, partial phenomena – more interested in advancing the party-interests, than being altruistic, advancing the general well being and the good of the population. If the assumption is that “you have politics, and I have

societal values and opinions”, it would be no surprise that most of the higher civil servants do not consider themselves as political. – But would this make a difference? Maybe it does, maybe does not!

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