RUSSO-SOVIET BUREAUCRATISM: RECENT RUSSIAN VIEWS

Introduction

Bureaucratism: Significance and Definition. Unless the post-Communist Russian state, and newly privatized industrial and other enterprises as well, are able to employ an efficient administrative process in which behavior that undercuts policy, productivity and goals is minimal the Westernization and modernization of Russia will be severely hampered and unduly prolonged, and possibly even arrested for some time. This means that the creation of a truly post-Soviet, effective civil service "is a prerequisite for the establishment of democratic government in Russia." It is also the prerequisite for the reestablishment of "governability" and governance itself. An upsurge of mafia-like crime, the ignoring by the regions of central government decrees, and the non-payment of many taxes has produced a situation so like anarchy to many Russians that about a quarter of the voters cast their ballots for an authoritarian "solution," the chauvinist Zhirinovskii and his personal "party," in December 1993. And in July 1996, despite the victory of El'tsin and "change," 40 percent of the voters favored the Communists and at least stopping changes if not retrogression. It may well be that in Russia and the other "fledgling successors" to the Soviet Union "politics is distinguished by the weakness and incoherence of institutions." Although the lack of effective and honest public administration is only one of many problems affecting the Russian state and its government, the former parliamentary leader Khasbulatov is still correct in noting that "The pyramid of power controlled by the [Soviet—K.R.] state was a terrible thing. But, one

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way or another, it managed to govern. Nothing has replaced the 100,000 or so links of this mechanism's chain. . . .

Bureaucratism is on-the-job behavior by bureaucrats that is both formally unspecified and officially undesired and that impedes or distorts an administrative unit's officially designated work or goals. It is a major factor impeding the creation of a truly new Russian civil service, as well as inhibiting overall political and socio-economic modernization and the reestablishment of governance. As a contemporary Russian analyst states: "No one negative phenomenon . . . in this country has received and receives now as much required attention as does bureaucratism. . . . Practice has shown that bureaucratism is a tenacious and dangerous enemy of the economy and society as a whole . . . one of the most difficult obstacles on the paths of development . . . of renewal, democratization and glasnost."4

Another Russian commentator, once an aide to Gorbachev, notes that bureaucracy and bureaucratic abuse of power are now playing an "even more important role" in Russia than they did previously. He adds that El'tsin has a much larger staff than did Gorbachev and that the number of ministries is almost double the former number. An American correspondent with experience in Russia noted in 1996 that bureaucratic abuse is worse now than it was.5

This is not a new, post-Soviet problem. Both Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union were beset by bureaucratism. It is crucially important to learn and assess what Russians today say are the causes of bureaucratism and how it might be minimized to see if they, or some of them, are prepared, at least intellectually, to deal effectively with it. That is, what does the contemporary Russian discussion on bureaucratism tell us about present-day Russia and its government?

Definitions, Western. Not all bureaucratic informalism is bureaucratism or, as it is called in some of the literature on public administration, bureaucratic pathology. Some bureaucratism can be off-the-job, e.g., combining with others such as politicians to subvert or change the administrative situation, although here the term is used mainly for certain similar kinds of on-the-job

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4. E. I. Komarov, Biurokratizm—na sud glasnost (Bureaucratism to the Court of Glasnost) (Moscow: Political Literature, 1989), pp. 4 and 8.
5. Sergei A. Grigoriev, "Is the Yeltsin Era Over?," address at the New England Slavic Association Meeting, Russian Research Center, Harvard University, April 15, 1994. Grigoriev claims that whereas Gorbachev had a staff of 400, El'tsin's numbers 3,000 and that whereas 85 ministries once ran the entire Soviet Union, today there are 137 different ministries and state committees, though with less power. Michael Dobbs, "What the Russians Call Democracy," The Washington Post, June 16, 1996, p. C2.