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The Political Forms  
of Modern Society

Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism

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## What is Bureaucracy?

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Although the concept of bureaucracy has entered into the sphere of the social sciences and the public domain and now enjoys widespread currency, it remains so imprecise that we can justly continue to question the identity of the phenomenon to which it claims to refer. To ask 'What is bureaucracy?' is not simply to question the dimensions, the character, the origin or the future of a social phenomenon; it is also, implicitly or explicitly, to raise the fundamental question concerning the mode of being of this phenomenon.

The diversity of responses and the persistence of uncertainty is at first somewhat astonishing. But this astonishment is merely a first impression. Bureaucracy confronts us as a phenomenon of which everyone speaks and believes to have experienced in some way, and yet this phenomenon strangely resists conceptualization. So rather than attempting straightaway to provide yet another new definition or new description, we shall begin by assessing the difficulties encountered by theory, assume that they have some significance and allow ourselves to be led by this critical reflection to the issues which lie at the origin of these difficulties and which sustain them.

### Outline of the Problem of Bureaucracy

The first representation which we shall consider is that offered by Marxist theory in the analysis of the state bureaucracy. Marx already drew attention, in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, to the specific nature of the social stratum in charge of the administration of public affairs. In contrast to the corporations which were engaged in private activities and attached to particular interests, this stratum

appears as the bearer of a universal interest. The development of the theory of the state, by Marx in his later works and then by Lenin in *State and Revolution*, and the application of this theory to post-revolutionary Russian society by Trotsky, go hand in hand with a reflection on the role played by the bureaucracy as a stratum essentially linked to the structure of class society. In this perspective, the bureaucracy is neither a class nor a stratum analogous to those which can be distinguished within a class (such as office workers); its existence derives from the division of society into classes and from the class struggle, since its function is to secure the general acceptance of the rules of a common order (an order which no doubt stems from the relations of production but which must be formulated in universal terms and maintained by force). The bureaucracy is 'normally' at the service of the dominant class, since the administration of public affairs in the context of a given regime always presupposes the preservation of its status. But since it is not itself a mere section of this class, it can run counter to some of its interests, assuming that an overall balance of social forces enables it to, and thus acquire a relative autonomy. The limits of its power are always circumscribed by the configuration of social relations. In short, the bureaucracy is a special body within society. It is *special* because it has the function of supporting the established structure and its disappearance would signify the end of bourgeois domination (the first revolutionary measure of the Commune, said Marx in essence, was to have suppressed the bureaucracy by lowering the salaries of functionaries to the level of the average wage of a worker). It is *within society* because it is not a basis of social structuration, because its role within society is already determined by the real historical agents: by classes in conflict.

The perspective changes as soon as one observes the growth of strata concerned with administrative tasks in the various sectors which are part of civil society. It is then tempting to look for criteria that would enable one to define a type of social organization which would take account of the features of state bureaucracy, industrial bureaucracy, party bureaucracy, trade-union bureaucracy and so on. The observation of the multiple forms of bureaucracy introduces an historical and sociological perspective. Comparison encourages one to investigate the conditions for the emergence of bureaucracies and to define a single type which gives unity to their diverse characteristics.

In this second perspective, to which Max Weber's thesis could be linked, bureaucracy still appears as a particular mode of organization, as one mode among others, which corresponds to a more or less extended sector but which is still situated *within* society. In other words, the social dynamic does not seem to be affected by the growth of bureaucracies. The mode of production, the class relations or the political regime could be studied without reference to a phenomenon which designates merely a certain type of organization.

The theory of bureaucracy thus undergoes a real transformation when it is used to describe a new class which is regarded as the dominant class in one or several countries, or which is even seen as destined to replace the bourgeoisie throughout the world. This perspective is suggested by the evolution of the Russian regime after the rise of Stalin. The disappearance of the old property owners and the liquidation of the workers' organs of power have gone hand in hand with a considerable extension of the bureaucracy of the Communist Party and of the state which has taken direct control of the management of society. But the spectacle of the social transformations which have accompanied the development of monopolistic concentration in the great industrial countries, and notably in the United States, gives rise to a parallel reflection on the growth of a bureaucratic class. This perspective does indeed mark a transformation in the theory of bureaucracy, for the bureaucracy is now understood as a stratum capable, by virtue of the role that it plays in economic and cultural life, of supplanting the traditional representatives of the bourgeoisie and monopolizing power. It is thus perceived as the basis of a new historical project, as the centre of a new social structure.

Lastly, it seems to me that a new representation emerges in opposition to the perspective just described as soon as one claims to find in the phenomenon of *bureaucratization* a gradual erosion of the old distinctions linked to the existence of private property. Bureaucratization here refers to a process which tends to impose a homogeneous social framework on work at every level, whether the work of managers or the work of those who carry out orders, in such a way that the general stability of employment, the hierarchy of salaries and functions and the structure of authority results in the formation of a single scale of social status, however differentiated this scale may be. This last thesis, like the preceding one but in contrast to the other two, attributes a social dynamic to the bureaucracy or lends it

a certain finality of its own, the realization of which produces an upheaval in the traditional structure of society as a whole.

If such are the general contours of the problem of bureaucracy, we can now take up each of the theses in turn and allow ourselves to be guided by their contradictions. But I shall discuss at length only the first three, since the critique of the final thesis seems to me to follow naturally from the analysis of the others.

### **The Marxist Critique of the State Bureaucracy**

The Marxist representation of bureaucracy is determined, as was Hegel's, by a theory of history. When Marx criticized Hegel's philosophy of the state, his own theory was still in a state of gestation; but that did not matter greatly, for the philosophical viewpoint was of prime importance. It is nevertheless remarkable that Marx was able to sketch a description of the bureaucracy.

Hegel's mistake, according to Marx, was to have accepted the image which the bureaucracy presents of itself. It claims to embody the general interest and Hegel believes that it does. In reality, argues Marx, the general interest amounts to no more than the interest of the bureaucracy, which requires the continued existence of particular spheres of interest – the corporations and the estates – in order to present itself as an imaginary universality. The bureaucracy assigns its own aim to the state: the aim of maintaining the social division in order to confirm and sustain its own status as a particular and privileged body in society. Whereas civil society is the theatre of real activities, the bureaucracy is condemned to a kind of formalism in which it is fully preoccupied with preserving and legitimating the frameworks within which its activities are carried out. This critique uncovers a series of empirical characteristics of bureaucracy whose significance remains concealed to those who cling to appearances. In the first place, bureaucracy is marked by incompetence. As Marx observes, 'The highest point entrusts the understanding of details to the lower echelons, whereas these, on the other hand, credit the highest point with an understanding of the universal, and thus they deceive one another.'<sup>1</sup> But this incompetence is peculiar in the sense that it is turned into a system: 'The bureaucracy is a circle from which no one can escape.'<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, it lives for *secrecy*: the hierarchy guards the mysteries of the state and acts like a closed cor-

poration with regard to the outside world. It also gives rise to a cult of authority: 'authority is the basis of its knowledge, and the deification of authority is its conviction'.<sup>3</sup> Finally, it is open to a 'crass materialism'. The bureaucrat turns the ends of the state into his private ends: 'a pursuit of higher posts, the making of a career'.<sup>4</sup> Marx also shows that this materialism is accompanied by a spiritualism which is equally crass: the bureaucracy *wants to do everything*, and in the absence of a real function it is condemned to an incessant activity of justification.

Marx's analysis is applied to nineteenth-century Germany, i.e. to a backward society, but its significance is not thereby diminished. When he later observed a nation – the France of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte – where the growth of the bourgeoisie had eliminated particularities and destroyed the corporations, when he elaborated his theory of the state and treated the latter as an instrument in the service of the dominant class, he retained the idea, already developed against Hegel, that the state is an essentially parasitical body. Thus he described Bonaparte's regime as follows:

This executive power with its enormous bureaucratic and military organisation, with its extensive and artificial state machinery, *with a host of officials numbering half a million*, besides an army of another half million, this *appalling parasitic body*, which enmeshes the body of French society like a net and chokes all its pores, sprang up in the days of the absolute monarchy, with the decay of the feudal system, which it helped to hasten.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, the revolutionary measure *par excellence* of the Paris Commune was, in Marx's eyes, to have set up a government which was good value for money, that is, to have suppressed the privileges and hierarchies which were characteristic of the state bureaucracy. In *State and Revolution*, Lenin merely reiterates what Marx had said on all these points. The bureaucracy and the standing army, which he regards as the two most characteristic institutions of the state, are 'a parasite created by the internal antagonisms which rend that society, but a parasite which "chokes" all its vital pores'.<sup>6</sup> However, he offers some remarks which clarify the nature of this parasitical relation. On the one hand, he observes that the recruitment of the bureaucracy from the middle and lower strata detaches part of their members from the rest of the people and links their fate to that of the dominant class. On the other hand, he notes that the

state bureaucracy is the site of a permanent struggle between the major parties, which haggle over administrative perks and try to appropriate, especially during a change of regime, a large enough portion of the spoils to satisfy their clientele.

What is the significance of the Marxist analysis and what difficulties does it raise? In the first place, its merit is to present the state bureaucracy, taken as an empirical phenomenon, in a light which continues to clarify this phenomenon today as it did a century ago. It is a critique which reflects the common view of bureaucracy but which gives grounds for this view. Thus it observes, for example, that the bureaucracy is a circle from which no one can escape; in the realm of the office, subordinates leave it to their superiors to take initiatives and to resolve difficulties, while the latter expect their subordinates to give, at the level of particular cases, responses which fall short of the level of generality at which they conceive of them. This collaboration in incompetence suffices to link the clerk, located at the bottom of the hierarchy, to the system of which he is part, so much so that he cannot denounce this system without simultaneously denouncing the vanity of his own function, upon which his material existence depends. The Marxist analysis also observes that the bureaucrat strives for the highest position, that the work itself is subordinated to the attainment or maintenance of a personal status, in such a way that the bureaucracy appears as a vast network of personal relationships where relations of dependence are substituted for the relations objectively defined by the division of labour, and where groupings by clans and their struggles are superimposed on the formal hierarchy and tend constantly to reshape it in terms of their own demands. The distribution of the most important positions between the major parties appears, more so today than ever before, as a sharing out of the spoils as soon as there is a change of regime: in France the period of the Liberation and the rise of Gaullism provide recent examples.

These observations deserve to be emphasized. To say simply that such characteristics are well known would be to fail to explain why they have not been examined: Marx, and after him Lenin, provide us with an explanation. Even if the latter were false, we could not avoid the task which they set themselves. In order to appreciate the importance of bureaucracy, it is necessary to go beyond a superficial account which remains at the level of its official image. In this respect, Marxism offers a freshness of approach which compares favourably with the view of certain contemporary sociologists. But

as soon as Marx's description had been sketched, it was smothered by a theory. Hence the state bureaucracy was treated as a general category and no attempt was made to explain its functioning. If it is true that the bureaucracy is a circle which encloses all its members, it is nevertheless the case that it is stratified (that its very essence is stratification) and that all of its members do not participate in it in the same way. At what level is the power of bureaucrats situated? Why does the bureaucracy always grow in size? Does it serve merely as an overspill from the major political parties? Or does the very life of the bureaucratic organism contain a principle of proliferation. No doubt the state bureaucracy consists of individuals primarily drawn from the middle classes; but having become bureaucrats, do they remain members of their classes or do they change their attitudes and acquire new interests? Marxism does not answer these questions. Its conception of society as governed entirely by class struggle does not encourage one to study bureaucracy for its own sake.

Today the state is the largest capitalist entrepreneur and the largest source of investment. Beyond the sphere that it manages directly, it tends to orient its investments, at a national level, by means of its fiscal and economic policy. It is, of course, true that the state is itself the field of a struggle between the major political parties, that representatives of private capital operate within its administration and that its policy is often the outcome of forces which confront one another in society; but transposed into the sphere of the state, the struggle between groups is not the same as that which unfolds in civil society. The division of interests linked to the requirements of administering public affairs creates its own space for decision-making, a space which grows and takes shape as the state drains away more and more capital and takes over an increasing number of tasks previously left to private initiative. Moreover, the defence of the established order, which guarantees the position of dominant groups over those which are dominated, establishes and renews everyday the foundations of its sovereignty. The representation of state bureaucracy discussed above can no longer be sustained in this perspective either. In particular, the concept of parasitism which is applied to it seems insufficient, or at least indeterminate: Why does the bureaucratic mode of organization as such breed parasites? Why, for example, do ten unproductive positions grow up around one function that could be regarded as necessary in terms of the current state of the division of labour? Into

the Marxist theory slips the thesis that the bureaucracy, taken as a whole, is a parasitical phenomenon. In reality, the bureaucracy is necessary in the context of capitalist society; if critique is to be effective, it must be situated at the same level as that of the capitalist organization. But would it not then appear to be the case that there is a dialectic of domination in modern society whereby a social stratum concerned with organizing and perfecting the conditions of domination *accrues* at the same time as industrial labour invades every sector of social life and as the life of the masses is subordinated to it? Would it not appear to be the case, in sum, that the process of bureaucratization, so visible in the context of the state, occurs at the same time outside of this context, at the heart of what the young Marx still called civil society?

### **Bureaucracy as a Type of Organization**

Let us leave these questions aside for the time being and consider a second perspective: that which uncovers the multiplicity of bureaucracies in modern society and draws attention to their common function and similarity. Here I shall refer to Max Weber's contribution, which seems to me to be exemplary, and I shall try to draw out its essential elements.

Weber lists certain features which he regards as specific to modern bureaucracy.<sup>7</sup>

- 1 The duties of the functionaries are officially fixed by laws, rules or administrative measures.
- 2 The functions are hierarchical and integrated into a system of command so that all lower levels of authority are controlled by higher authorities and so that it is possible for the decisions of a lower instance to be appealed to a higher instance.
- 3 Administrative activity is recorded in written documents.
- 4 Administrative functions presuppose a professional apprenticeship.
- 5 The work of the functionary demands complete devotion to the job.
- 6 Access to the profession is at the same time access to a particular technique, to jurisprudence, commercial science and administrative science.

From this analysis one can draw several conclusions concerning the position of the bureaucrat.

- 1 His job appears to him as the exercise of a profession which is linked to a specific body of knowledge; on the other hand, it is neither in fact nor in principle the source of fees or dividends, nor is it the object of a contract whereby the employee hires out his labour power. The particular character of the job implies that, in exchange for certain material guarantees (the guarantee of a certain standard of living), the functionary accepts a specific duty of loyalty to the job; he is at the service, not of a person, but of an objective and impersonal goal. This goal is built into the organization to which he is linked – the state, the commune, the party or the capitalist firm – and realizes certain cultural values.
- 2 Those who work within a public or private bureaucracy enjoy social prestige *vis-à-vis* dominated groups; this prestige is most often guaranteed by a special status which grants certain rights sanctioned by rules.
- 3 The functionary is normally appointed by a superior authority. Although there may be certain bureaucracies in which the members are elected, the pure type requires the principle of appointment; hierarchical discipline is undermined when the functionary draws his power from the approval of electors, that is, *from below* rather than *from above*.
- 4 The stability of employment is normally assured, even though a right of possession of the job is never recognized.
- 5 The bureaucrat normally receives remuneration in the form of a salary determined by the nature of the job and, eventually, by the years of his service in the organization.
- 6 Finally, corresponding to the hierarchical order of the bureaucracy, a scale of salaries is established; most functionaries want promotions to take place as mechanically as possible.

Weber also points to the role of certain factors in the absence of which bureaucracy could not fully develop. For example, its structure is definitively established only when the sectors of natural economy have been finally eliminated and capitalism dominates society. The growth of democracy, on the other hand, enables the traditional administration of notables, endowed with local authority, to be replaced by the administration of anonymous functionaries,

detached from any particular social milieu and devoted to tasks of universal significance. Finally, Weber goes so far as to identify the movement of bureaucratization with the process of capitalist rationalization. For what seems to him to be determinant is not so much the quantitative development of administrative tasks but rather their qualitative change: the necessity which obliges the large organization, of whatever kind (even the state), to envisage its activities from a strictly technical point of view and to predict or calculate the results as accurately as possible. Bureaucracy in this sense is the social framework which is most adequate to the capitalist organization of production and to the organization of a society adapted to these ends. The elimination of personal relations and the subordination of all activities to the application of a norm linked to an objective goal turn bureaucracy into a model of the economic rationality established by industrial capitalism. Hence Weber does not hesitate to express a value judgement about modern bureaucracy, declaring that it is superior from a technical point of view to all other forms of organization.

However, it does not follow that the development of bureaucracies, however necessary they may seem once certain conditions are realized, must affect the nature of the political and economic system. On the contrary, Weber maintains that the numerical extent of this form of organization in no way determines its relation to power. This is demonstrated by the fact that the state bureaucracy accommodates itself to different regimes, as for example in France, where the state bureaucracy has remained remarkably stable since the first Empire. It is also demonstrated by the fact that in periods of war the bureaucratic personnel of the conquered country is naturally used by the foreign power and continues to carry out its administrative tasks. The bureaucracy is essentially indifferent to the interests and values defended by a political regime. It is an organ at the service of dominant groups, situated, as it were, between those who dominate and those who are dominated.

These analyses take on their full significance only when they are placed within a certain methodological perspective. Bureaucracy is seen by Weber as a type of social organization. In reality, bureaucracies do not necessarily attain their complete and finished form; certain empirical conditions are required for the various characteristics to be simultaneously present. But the type, once defined, renders the impure forms intelligible and enables one to discern the

outlines of a form which historical conditions have not allowed to develop. Even when Weber observes that the process of bureaucratization and that of capitalist rationalization are closely linked, this observation must not be misconstrued: historical explanation is of a different order than the determination of a social type.

Thus the method determines, at least in part, its results. If bureaucracy is regarded as essentially indifferent to the nature of the economic and social systems, if it appears to have no historical goal, it is because it has been conceived by Weber as a type of organization, that is, in a purely formal way, and not as a specific social stratum which, at the same time as it establishes a certain order and style of relations between its members, produces a history of its own. As a result, the case of 'state socialism' cannot be confronted by Weber in an unprejudiced way. According to him, the bureaucracy can adapt itself more easily to state socialism than it can to bourgeois democracy; and yet the history of state socialism is not internally connected to that of the bureaucracy. The conclusions that Weber draws in this regard are curiously similar to those of certain Marxists, even though they are inspired by different principles. In the eyes of certain Marxists, the state bureaucracy is unconnected to the social dialectic which unfolds at the level of the relations of production. In Weber's eyes, a sequence of events can be reconstituted in order to render the emergence of state socialism intelligible; but bureaucratization does not generate these events, even though it may be favoured by them.

Now this thesis, preoccupied as it is with offering an empirical description, can be called into question more easily than Marx's thesis by adducing certain features of historical development. In the regime stemming from the Russian Revolution which Weber calls 'state socialism' (an expression which need not be criticized here), the bureaucracy is not *in fact* unconnected to power. The future leaders of the state are born within it: Stalin made a career in the party bureaucracy, pursued for a long time the highest position before attaining it, added to his function as secretary that of state bureaucrat before becoming the master of power. The fact that he acquired a charismatic quality during his reign does not mean that he detached himself from the bureaucracy: the latter was the permanent basis of his power. While charisma can disappear or change character with the death of a dictator, the new power will reconstitute itself on the basis of the bureaucracy. The political struggles

which take place at the highest level of the hierarchy and which concern the future direction of the state extend into broad sectors of the upper bureaucracy; Khrushchev won out in the end only because he was *supported* by the majority of the elements which controlled the bureaucratic apparatus. It thus seems clear that where the state bureaucracy has become most extensive, it has encompassed the ultimate political and economic decisions in its sphere or, in other words, it has become the core of a new regime. But if Weber had acknowledged this, he would not have formulated his definition of the bureaucratic type as he did. His account is premised on the refusal to accept that the bureaucracy has its own dynamic and intrinsic goal; thus he fails to investigate its *constitutive* features, that is, the ways in which it is rooted in its social being and increases its power. The enumeration of criteria may be useful, but the phenomenon which they designate remains indeterminate so long as one has not grasped the principle which links these criteria. It matters little whether one adds or subtracts a criterion; the principle underlying such an operation is not clear. Nothing enables one to decide whether, in the absence of certain features highlighted by the description of a type, a social complex is or is not bureaucratic. In order to make this decision, one must move to a different level and identify the centre of bureaucratization within this complex.

This criticism applies not only to Weber, but to any attempt to provide a formal definition of a similar kind. For example, Alain Touraine writes as follows in a special issue of *Arguments* devoted to the French working class:

I call bureaucracy a system of organization where statuses and roles, rights and duties, conditions of access to a position, controls and sanctions are defined by their situation in a hierarchical order and hence by a certain delegation of authority. These two characteristics presuppose a third: the fundamental decisions are not taken within the bureaucratic organization, which is merely a system of transmission and execution.<sup>8</sup>

This definition, evidently inspired by Weber but benefiting from conciseness, no doubt has a field of application. When Touraine goes on to say that a government ministry is a bureaucratic organization, it is easy to agree with him. But when he adds that an industrial firm is *partially* bureaucratic, the difficulty appears. If it is true that only the first characteristic of bureaucracy is found here,

then how can we conclude that the firm is a partial bureaucracy? Must we assume that a system of organization functioning according to fixed rules and in an impersonal way already engenders bureaucratization? If, on the other hand, we recognize that the criterion of the delegation of authority is decisive and that in fact the worker does not participate in authority, then in what sense can one speak of a 'bureaucratization of work'? This equivocation is exacerbated when, in the same issue of *Arguments*, Michel Crozier takes up Touraine's definition and remarks that 'the worker in Western countries in general, and the French worker in particular, are already well advanced along the path of bureaucracy'.<sup>9</sup> 'The delegation of authority,' he tells us, 'is not necessary for participation in a bureaucratic system'; it is characterized essentially by the existence of a hierarchy. Does this mean that it is possible to *belong* to the system without holding any authority? But if that were so then the problem would simply be displaced, for we would still have to define the relations within the bureaucratic system between the sector characterized by relations of authority and the sector concerned with carrying out tasks of construction and subordinated to an external authority; in other words, the problem of determining the role played by relations of authority in the constitution of the bureaucracy would remain. Even if it had to be admitted that a bureaucratic system taken as a whole did not necessarily make room for these relations and that it was characterized essentially by the existence of a hierarchy, it would still be necessary to specify what it means concretely to speak of a hierarchy of the bureaucratic type. In itself this notion is so vague that it can be applied to contexts of very different kinds: nothing is more hierarchical, for example, than the court of a hereditary monarchy. What, then, is the basis of the hierarchy in a bureaucracy? What justifies a vertical classification of functions and roles? The need to evaluate the significance of this or that criterion in terms of some conception of bureaucracy is always reintroduced.

If Weber listed a certain number of precise characteristics of bureaucracy without wishing to privilege the one characteristic among them which could alone refer to another social reality, it is because he had a strong sense of its specificity. The interest of his analysis stems from the fact that he links this sense to an awareness of the multiplicity of the forms of bureaucratic organization in modern society. Even if his analysis falls short, it has the merit of obliging us to confront his examples and the type he proposes and

thus to arrive at a new representation and a new integration of the features he highlights.

Let us return again to the example of the state bureaucracy, now that we are aware of the dangers involved in treating it as essentially unconnected to political power, in order to ask which stratum of functionaries Weber wished to circumscribe. His definition certainly applies to the personnel of a ministry, at least to the functionaries whose roles involve certain responsibilities; as regards subordinate personnel who are concerned with merely carrying out orders and whose working time is rigorously specified and supervised, it cannot be said that the job implies loyalty and devotion to the goal of the organization, and a professional training which itself presupposes the possession of specialized knowledge. But does this definition, strictly speaking, apply to all functionaries holding responsible positions? For example, can it be said, adopting Weber's perspective, that secondary-school teachers are part of the bureaucracy in France? The position of the teacher corresponds exactly to that which Weber attributed to the bureaucrat. Only on one point does the definition not apply: participation in a system of authority. It could not be said that access to a certain position or to a certain level in the hierarchy gives the teacher some sort of power over subordinates. On the other hand, his position *vis-à-vis* his superiors is quite special. He is certainly subjected to an administrative power; his fate depends on decisions taken at the highest level of a government department. But for the most part he is free from this power: the content of his activity is only very partially determined by ministerial decisions. This professional activity has its own goal which should not be confused with the objective goal immanent in the ministerial organization; it is an activity oriented towards a transformation of its object and this alone can provide it with a sufficient justification. Moreover, and most importantly, the teacher is not aiming to *make a career* out of his profession. He may hope for a change, for a movement from one level of seniority to another by the most rapid route, but he does not adopt the approach which is offered to the bureaucrat: to acquire a new function which will bring with it a higher social status, greater responsibilities and increased power over dependent human beings. Finally, the secondary-school teacher remains, in certain respects, an *isolated* individual. No doubt his activity is social, since it necessarily brings him into contact with the public, but it is not socialized: the division of labour may require him to specialize in

one branch of teaching and thus to link his activity to that of other teachers, but it does not generate a unified production process.

In short, if we try to apply the concept of bureaucracy in the way that Weber himself did (leaving aside the value judgements which are implicated in his description), we are led to exclude certain strata of functionaries from the framework of bureaucracy and simultaneously to revise his system of interpretation.

If it is true that Weber had not included French *lycée* teachers in his type, it follows that the characteristics which he regarded as typical and which apply to our example acquire a significance only in certain precise cases. On the other hand, there are certain features in the absence of which it seems impossible to speak of bureaucracy. In the first place, we perceive a link between a certain form of hierarchy and the existence of a system of authority (of command-subordination, as Weber says), such that progression in the hierarchy corresponds to the attainment of new statuses, of new responsibilities and of new power. In the second place, Weber's idea that the bureaucracy expects its members to identify with the organization concerned proves to have a sociological content (and not merely an apologetic function as it initially may have seemed). For such an identification presupposes a professional activity of a certain type, linked to a *role*, which is itself determined by relation to other roles within the dramatic unity of the organization. The bureaucracy expects a deputy chief clerk to say 'the Ministry' or 'the Service' instead of 'I'; and this character exists himself as a bureaucrat by this very act of identification, an act which would have no sense for all those who are rendered strictly anonymous by their work or who are individualized to such an extent that work becomes a sufficient justification of existence. In other words, what Weber calls identification with the job is something other than professional consciousness. Whereas the latter is oriented towards the act of production, the former is concerned with the exercise of responsibility: it calls for behaviour which responds to the expectations of hierarchical superiors and conforms to the interest of the bureaucracy, behaviour which should be manifested by any member of the bureaucracy placed in the same conditions. Hence the activity of the bureaucrat has two characteristics: it is technical and bureaucratic. It may lose the first but not the second. For example, the intense circulation of reports or memos in offices serves only to express the necessity for each individual to demonstrate his function to everyone else; the bureaucracy

functions only by virtue of a mutual and constantly renewed recognition among its members, sustained in accordance with a specific ceremonial. As someone once remarked, the volume of paper consumed for internal use in an administration enables one to measure its coefficient of bureaucratic integration. Stripped of any malevolent intention, this observation shows that the bureaucracy can act only by constantly reflecting its activity in the mirror of its constitution. Finally – and this is the third conclusion that we can provisionally draw – Weber's analysis presupposes, by the place it gives to the system of command-subordination, that there is a geographical unity, a determinate spatial context of bureaucratic activities. Of course, all the members of a bureaucracy are not necessarily assembled in the same place, but their interrelations, the discipline which links them together and the supervision of some by others tend to circumscribe a specific office world.

A second example mentioned by Weber, that of the industrial firm, will enable us to test his ideas and to clarify ours. In the first place, we are led once again to ask whether the bureaucracy is merely an organ of transmission and execution. While recognizing that an industrial firm is never autonomous and that it must take account of the interests of the financial capital on which it depends, or of the directives of a ministry in a nationalized industry, nevertheless it remains the case that the management has considerable power for decision-making. Now these decisions as a whole are not in the hands of an individual; whatever the personality of the managing director, the decision-making power is necessarily distributed among the different departments and is actualized within each department only through a more or less collective participation in the solution of specific problems. To ask whether the management is or is not distinct from the bureaucracy is to pose a false problem. In any organization in which the hierarchy culminates in an ultimate form of decision-making, this form transcends in a certain way all those which are subordinate to it; nevertheless, if the power which it formally holds is in reality *composite*, that is, if the decisions which fall within its scope by virtue of officially fixed prerogatives are in fact elaborated, at least in part, at various lower levels, then it is itself part of the framework that it dominates.

As in the case of the state bureaucracy, however, the most important issue concerning the bureaucracy of the firm is to try to determine its boundaries. Which are the individuals who are normally

*bureaucrats*, and which are those who can be regarded as falling outside this category?

It is clear that for Weber the definition of the capitalist firm as a bureaucratic organization (he goes so far as to say that it offers an unparalleled model of such organization) does not in any way determine the sector which, within the enterprise, can be described as bureaucratic. To maintain, for example – we already alluded to this argument of Crozier – that workers are part of the bureaucracy as soon as they are placed with engineers and managers on a single hierarchical scale, would no doubt have seemed rather extravagant to Weber, not because some of his criteria would have been unsatisfied but because the position of a social group cannot be established on the basis of its juridical status alone. The fact that the work of one category of workers has become assimilated to that of functionaries tells us nothing about the specific nature of the work and the relations with other social categories within a particular firm. Whether or not the firm is nationalized, whether stability of employment is guaranteed or not, whether or not workers are integrated with managerial staff in the same hierarchical system: these conditions may have important consequences in certain respects, but they do not resolve the problem of ascertaining the *real* situation of employees. In the industrial firm, the mass of workers is restricted to tasks of carrying out orders. The arrangement of workshops, the number and distribution of jobs, the rate of production and the duration and intensity of work are all fixed by an administration which operates at a distance from the shopfloor and which forms a closed and alien world with respect to it.

On the other hand, is it possible to treat all those who work in offices as part of the bureaucracy? In the first place, one must be careful to avoid confusing technical departments with those concerned with administrative and commercial tasks. They no doubt share certain common organizational norms, but the social relations differ in each case as a result of the work performed. In short, the relations of authority and the links established with the firm are not similar. In technical departments, the engineers, technicians and designers have, by virtue of their professional knowledge, a relative autonomy. The supervision of work can be effective only if the boss has a technical competence which is at least equal to that of his subordinates, that is, only if his supervision is a technically superior operation. Social supervision may be practically non-existent, for

the requirements of work, within the framework of a fixed time-period, may suffice to establish a normal rate of output. Moreover, the autonomy of technicians is also indicated by their ability to move, by virtue of their skills, from one firm to another. In general terms, the job of the technician depends much more on the nature of the work he performs than on his position in the social organization of the firm.

The functioning of the administrative departments presents a very different picture. Here, at the bottom of the scale, we find clerks without real qualifications, employees whose professional training is rudimentary or non-existent. Between these employees and the managing director of the firm, the hierarchy of jobs is a hierarchy of power. The relations of dependence become determinant and to have a function is to define oneself, at each level, with regard to a superior, whether he is a branch supervisor, a departmental supervisor or a manager. In this context the double nature of work thus reappears: it both corresponds to a professional activity and constitutes itself as the expression of an established social order, an order within which the firm exists. Indeed, from the top to the bottom of the scale, the relations are such that they serve always to reinforce the authoritarian structure of the administration. But that does not mean that the individuals situated at the bottom of the scale participate in the bureaucracy in the same way as the middle or upper strata. In certain respects, clerks are like the workers who carry out orders, deprived of any authority. They often earn less than certain categories of workers who are paid by the hour. Their work could not be described as 'responsible' and it cannot be assumed that they find in their work a basis for identifying with the aims of the firm. Nevertheless, they are not unconnected to the bureaucracy: they are its *dependents*. They generally enter the firm only if they are equipped with references which testify to their 'good character'; they can obtain promotion only by giving proof of their capacity to obey and to command; they live in the hope of attaining higher status. The situation of the clerk is therefore ambiguous. He is not integrated into the bureaucratic system, he submits to it; but everything tends to make him adhere to it, and indeed he effectively does when he adopts the ideal of his superiors - promotion. Moreover, to the extent that his work is determined by the social organization of the firm, he is less able to detach himself from the bureaucratic milieu; and in drawing from this milieu the resources which are necessary

for his subsistence, he perceives it as being as necessary as the organization itself.

The bureaucracy is thus a framework which goes beyond the active core of bureaucrats. The latter is constituted by the middle and upper staff which is concerned with administrative and commercial tasks; it is a hierarchy with roots which plunge into the productive sector, where supervisors and foremen monitor the activity of workers. This staff possesses effective authority. Not only do its members occupy positions which are linked, by virtue of a certain division of labour, to officially defined prerogatives, not only are they subjected, each in his place, to a certain discipline, but also their function enables them to participate in the power of the management and makes them identify with the firm as such. To say that they identify with it does not mean that they necessarily have a clear idea of the firm's interests, nor even that they are led to put the latter above their own. It means only that the horizons of the firm are completely fused, in their eyes, with the horizons of their work. The social order immanent in the firm appears to them as something which is both natural and sacred. Their own function is seen by them as something other than a source of remuneration or a type of professional activity: it is seen as the backbone of a system which needs their support in order to survive and expand.

Possessing a status which apparently differentiates his position from that of workers who merely carry out orders, enjoying a prestige which earns the others' respect, receiving a remuneration and material benefits which secure a privileged mode of existence, belonging to a world apart from which authority stems, a world where subordination is the other side of issuing commands and where opportunities for promotion are available: such are the inter-related features which define the figure of the bureaucrat.

Finally, the example of the bureaucracy of the firm dispels, better than any other, the mystification entailed by a purely formal description. The latter presupposes that the bureaucratic organization merges with the rational organization of the firm, in so far as it is rendered necessary by the technical requirements of production. Now as soon as we try to circumscribe the properly bureaucratic sector and are led to highlight a specific type of activity, we uncover a dialectic of socialization which is of a different order than the dialectic of the division of labour.

To say that it is of a different order does not mean that we could determine what an adequate social organization of the firm would be at a certain state of the division of labour, since the latter depends itself on historical conditions which include technical evolution and class conflict. It is simply to maintain that the bureaucratic organization has its own objective which cannot be deduced from the necessities imposed by the organization of production. Once it is recognized that in every large firm there are, in addition to the productive and technical sectors, various categories of tasks relating to the administration of personnel, the sale of products, the purchase of primary materials and machines, the fixing of cost price, etc. it does not follow *naturally* that the specialized departments function as they do in the actual context of the modern capitalist factory. The requirements of planning, co-ordination and information do not necessarily create a determinate social order. This order institutes itself by virtue of a particular social activity. From this point of view, it is essential to grasp the movement by which the bureaucracy creates its order. *The more that activities are fragmented, departments are diversified, specialized and compartmentalized, structural levels are multiplied and authority is delegated at each level, the more the instances of co-ordination and supervision proliferate, by virtue of this very dispersion, and the more bureaucracy flourishes.*

The status of a bureaucrat can be assessed in terms of the number of secretaries and clerks who depend on him, the number of telephones and machines in his department and, more generally, the quantity of resources which are allocated to his sphere of organization. At every favourable opportunity he seeks to extend his area of power; and he seeks always to preserve it. This tendency results in the formation of clans, in a covert war between departments which is constantly nourished by their separation, each one rushing to blame the other for errors or delays in carrying out a programme. But at the same time, since it reflects a common aspiration, this tendency always finds its path. The more bureaucrats there are and the more complicated the system of personal dependence becomes, the more the bureaucracy as a whole is constituted as a rich and differentiated milieu and acquires an existence for itself. The more established the bureaucracy becomes, the more likely it is that individuals draw from it the sense of their own objectivity. Bureaucracy loves bureaucrats, just as much as bureaucrats love bureaucracy.

The consequences of this situation may seem paradoxical. It is true, as Weber said, that the capitalist firm provides bureaucracy

with a privileged context of development, that the process of economic rationalization provides a rationale for bureaucratic organization: the need to develop forms of calculation and prediction which are as rigorous as possible favours the growth of a special stratum of administrators and imposes on them a certain type of structuration. But it is no less true that this stratum plans its behaviour, actively intervenes in its structuration and, placed in historically created conditions, expands while pursuing its interest. Thus, behind the mask of rules and impersonal relations lies the proliferation of unproductive functions, the play of personal contacts and the madness of authority.

The third example which we shall consider is the mass party. This example will provide us with a kind of counter-proof, for it will confront us with a bureaucracy which appears to be as distant as possible from that we have just discussed. Once again, this is an example to which Weber referred; and that is no surprise, for Weber was aware that there is a close connection between the party bureaucracy and the state bureaucracy, and he had witnessed the emergence of a state bureaucracy in Russia out of the Communist Party. But it is surprising, in turn, that this example did not lead him to revise his definition of the bureaucratic organization. For it does not suffice to observe that the party is led by a body of 'professional' specialists in order to assimilate the latter to functionaries or to the administrators of a firm. Most of Weber's criteria are not applicable to them. In the first place, if one considers the organization of the party, it is now obvious that the bureaucracy is not merely an organ of execution and transmission: the leadership which is embodied in a politbureau or a general secretariat emerges from the bureaucracy. It hardly matters whether an individual or a handful of individuals hold all real power; they have acquired it only by rising through the hierarchy of the party and they retain it only because they are sustained by a stratum of bureaucrats who orientate the activity of the party in accordance with their directives, who justify and enact their decisions and who oust the opponents. If this stratum disintegrates, the power of the leaders collapses. In the second place, while the functions of the bureaucrats may be laid down by rules, they do not form as structured a whole as in the case of the administration of a state or a firm. There are not strict rules which determine the movement from one job to another; the hierarchy does not give rise to a differentiation and grading of salaries; bureaucrats no longer enjoy a

special status, officially defined, which would distinguish them from rank and file activists; access to the highest positions does not depend on technical knowledge, itself linked to a professional training; if the principle of the appointment of officials by the organs of leadership is recognized, it co-exists with a principle of election, since these organs are themselves elected within the framework of assemblies composed of delegates mandated by rank and file activists; and finally, one need not be remunerated by the party in order to occupy an important function within it and to be placed at a high level in the hierarchy. The special character of the party bureaucracy stems from the position which it occupies in society as a whole. Its function is not determined by the division of labour; it is an institution which is based on voluntary membership and which tries to exercise an influence on power, to participate in it or to take hold of it, by assembling a mass of individuals around a programme of demands. The fact that a sector of professionals concerned to co-ordinate the activities of the party is constituted within it does not affect its formal definition; on the contrary, it confers on this sector a series of characteristics which appear to be very different from those we observed in the case of the industrial firm.

But then how can one speak of the mass party as a typical bureaucratic institution? This question brings us closer to the issue which I have tried to formulate since the beginning of this analysis: What is the social nature of the bureaucracy? Now if the mass party sheds light on this issue, it is not because we can define the party in terms of criteria which would be equally applicable to the industrial firm; more fundamentally, it is because we can distinguish a specific sector within the party where functions are ranked hierarchically by virtue of their participation in the exercise of power, where decisions are taken which affect the orientation of the party in the absence of any control from below, where responsibilities are allocated in an authoritarian way, where organizational discipline prevails over the unrestricted analysis of decisions, where a continuity of roles, activities and persons is established so that a ruling minority is rendered practically irremovable. In other words, bureaucracy appears within the party as the antithesis of democracy. But this observation becomes meaningful only if we understand how the bureaucratic organization is formed. Its genesis is all the more noticeable in that it does not depend *directly* on economic conditions. As I mentioned above, the party is based on voluntary membership which is itself motivated by ideological agree-

ment concerning a programme. Now this characteristic, in itself, does not entail any *particular* form of organization. The technical need for an organization is only present, and is all the more determinant, when the party brings together a broad mass. But the necessity of co-ordinating the activities of small local sections, of securing the best propaganda and of properly managing the funds raised by members does not require a specific kind of social milieu. It is only by virtue of a certain *choice* that this milieu is constituted as bureaucratic. Of course, the term 'choice' must not be understood as implying that individuals decide, after careful reflection, to form a bureaucratic organization; it means only that a certain type of behaviour becomes necessary, and as a result certain demands take absolute precedence while others fade away.

Let us clarify the nature of this choice: since the party is based on voluntary membership and animated by an agreement among individuals concerning ideas, it would seem to follow that the maintenance of this membership and agreement is essential to the life of the organization. The party claims to be the expression of a collective will, the locus of co-operation: it would seem to lose its *raison d'être* if it exercised coercion over its members; and, *formally*, it cannot exercise coercion because its members are not dependent on the party for their livelihood. But on the other hand the party must act as a coherent force within society as a whole, maintaining continuity in its action, binding together in a permanent way those who lend it their support, finding a structure which guarantees its unity independently of the uncertain participation of its members.

Now if it is true that the existence of the mass party gives rise to these two alternatives, the bureaucracy is constituted by allowing the second alternative to prevail absolutely over the first and by doing this in a way which renders its own existence ever more necessary and endows its choice with an irreversible character. From the outset bureaucrats establish themselves as those whose work maintains the existence and unity of the party; and certainly their activity within the party makes them indispensable elements. But this activity has a special character which appears as soon as one compares it with the activity of ordinary militants: it is focused on the institution itself. It is what is usually called an 'organizational activity'. But this term is imprecise because it does not bring out the essential point: the activity is always concerned with directing the militants' work in a way that attests to the existence and power of the party. The fundamental

aspect of this organization is the multiplication of the organs of the party: the more cells and sections there are and the more differentiated the life of the institution is, the more its power is materialized and the more numerous are the officials appointed to each sector and to the tasks of co-ordination which their separation renders necessary. The efficacy of bureaucratic work can thus be assessed in terms of the capacity of officials to preserve and extend the field of activity which they organize. But this assessment can be formulated in objective (shareable) terms only if one considers the formal aspect of the activity of the bureaucrat – the fetishism of the agenda at the regular assemblies of the party, the multiplicity of reunions, meetings, celebrations or commemorations, the existence of what could be called ‘activism’: a feverish and vain agitation which has become routine. The number and diversity of ceremonies from which the institution draws its daily justification goes hand in hand with the proliferation of bureaucrats. If they are entirely at the service of the party they become professionals, but they do not have to be in order to act as such. It is sufficient if their activity is precisely circumscribed, if it is concerned essentially with the preservation of the party and if it is carried out in the context of instructions issued by the leadership in order to give their function the appearance of a job.

The bureaucracy taken as a whole is this milieu for which the structure of the party is necessary, sacred and irremovable. But this milieu is itself the agent of a certain structuration. In identifying itself with the ends which justify the existence of the party, it turns the party – to paraphrase Marx – into its private property; it regards itself as necessary, sacred and irremovable. The defence of the party is the bureaucracy’s self-defence. But this implies a particular interpretation of the party’s aims which results in a distortion of its original vocation. For the party can intervene directly in social conflicts (as it must do if it is to conform to its basic principle) or create a broad internal space for ideological discussion only at the risk of transforming itself, or at the limit of destroying itself. The bureaucratic group thus feels that it is threatened as soon as a principle of change is introduced in the party: it is naturally conservative.

This conservatism infuses all inter-bureaucratic relations. The cult of authority, the desire to control the activity of militants at every level and the prestige accorded to functions of responsibility are so many manifestations of this conservatism, so well known that they hardly need to be emphasized. In the last instance, this aspect

of the bureaucracy's behaviour has its own logic. For the party is not a purely artificial organism, born out of ideological motivations. It exists as a mass organization in the context of society as a whole; not only does it aim to seize power, but it also penetrates, in varying degrees depending on the circumstances, every sector of society. This penetration enables it to secure jobs for a significant number of its militants in departments where it controls the recruitment, either directly or through the intermediary of a friendly association. The party, which may seem like an incomplete bureaucracy if it is regarded as an isolated institution, thus displays certain material determinations of bureaucratic stability when it is placed in the context of society as a whole.

Of course, the examples that I have chosen and deliberately borrowed from Weber share certain features, but above all they encourage us to examine the phenomenon in a certain way. The bureaucracy, in my view, is a group which tends to make a certain mode of organization prevail, which develops in determinate conditions and flourishes by virtue of a certain state of the economy and of technical development, but which is what it is, in essence, only by virtue of a particular kind of social activity. Any attempt to grasp bureaucracy which does not give prominence to a specific type of behaviour thus seems to me doomed from the outset. Bureaucracy exists only through bureaucrats and through their collective intention to constitute a world set apart from dominated groups, to participate in a socialized power and to define themselves in relation to one another in terms of a hierarchy which guarantees a material status or prestige for each of them.

To emphasize the phenomenon of social behaviour is not to reduce bureaucracy to a summation of similar activities. The activity of an isolated individual is unintelligible; it becomes meaningful only when it is placed in the context of a group. The formation of bureaucracy involves an immediate socialization of activities and behaviour. Here the group is not a category of activity or of socio-economic status: it is a concrete milieu from which each individual derives his own identity. But this observation also brings out the connection between bureaucracy and the mass institution. Bureaucracy finds its appropriate form in the mass institution – the ministry, the union, the party, the industrial firm – because the unity of the context, the interconnection of tasks, the number of jobs, the proximity of individuals to the interior of each sector, the prospect of a

rapid development of the institution and the amount of capital involved all contribute to circumscribing a social field of power. Hence the identification of the bureaucrat with the firm to which he is attached is a natural mediation in the consciousness which the group acquires of its own identity. But, as we have seen in each of the examples analysed above, this identification must not conceal the fact that the fate of the bureaucracy is not strictly imposed by the technical structure of the mass institution, for the bureaucracy moulds its own destiny. As the agent of a distinctive form of structuration, it multiplies jobs and departments, separates off different sectors of activity, sets up artificial forms of supervision and co-ordination and reduces an ever-growing mass of workers to the function of carrying out orders, thus subjecting these workers at every level to a form of authority seeking to attain its maximum force by creating a system of relations of dependence which is as differentiated as possible.

### **Bureaucracy as Class**

On the basis of these considerations, we may briefly examine the thesis that the bureaucracy can be understood as a class. There is no doubt, in my view, that a dominant class exists in the USSR. Those who persist in denying it can do no more than recite certain passages from Marx according to which the abolition of private property entails the disappearance of the dominant class, while failing to see that at a deeper level the class opposition has re-established itself in the relations of production. At this level, the form assumed by the ownership of the means of production is no longer determinant; what is determinant is the division between capital and labour. The fact that the proletariat is excluded from the management of production and reduced to functions of carrying out orders is what establishes it as an exploited class. The fact that all the decisions which determine economic life (concerning the size and distribution of investments, wages, the intensity and duration of work, etc.) are made by a particular social stratum is what establishes the position of a dominant class in relation to the proletariat. Nevertheless, my concern here is not to discuss the class nature of the USSR, but rather to make it clear at the outset that the bureaucracy can be regarded as a class only if one recognizes that it has its own dynamism, a dynamism which can be discerned initially in the context of traditional capitalist society and, in particular, in the context

of the mass institutions where it develops. To define it as a parasitical organ or as a mere economic category is to disregard the ways in which it creates, by virtue of a specific mode of behaviour, a *milieu of power* and uses the circumstances in order to extend and consolidate it. On the other hand, by recognizing its distinctive historicity one is able to grasp, at the horizons of its activity, a world which it would like to mould in its image and constitute as the dominant class. The genesis of the bureaucracy in Russia is intelligible, in the last analysis, only if it is related to the genesis of a social type which is realized, in different forms, in all modern nations.

However, the analysis of the conditions in which the dominant class was formed after the Russian Revolution presents a privileged case for observing the properly social activity by which the bureaucracy constructs its power. While it may be true that this class is what it is today only by virtue of its function in the process of production, only by virtue of the planning and the nationalizations which secure its material basis, nevertheless it originated in – one can never stress this too much – a political bureaucracy whose very first weapons were not the extraction of surplus value in the context of modern industry but rather the concentration of authority in the hands of a ruling minority, the exclusion of the masses from the sphere where information circulates and decisions are taken, the hierarchical stratification of functions and the differentiation of salaries, the rigorous division of competences – in short, a scientific organization of inequality, which became the principle of a new form of class oppression. Of course, the bureaucracy of the party did not artificially create an entirely new world; and it would even be something of an understatement to say that it was aided by the circumstances. The destruction of the political and economic power of the old property owners, the taking over of large sectors of production by the state, the existence of an industry which had already attained in certain domains a high degree of concentration and hence of modern administration, the example of the large capitalist industrial countries which testified to a growing fusion of capital and the state: all these factors prepared the way for a new type of class domination. But this domination cleared its own path only by the action of the party which, through ideology, terror and privilege, fused together elements drawn from all the classes of the old Russian society.

Moreover, it is not sufficient to point out the existence of a privileged class in the USSR, nor even to trace its own genesis, in order

to understand what bureaucracy actually is within the whole society that it dominates. An analysis which restricts itself to highlighting the phenomenon of exploitation at the level of the relations of production does not yet illuminate the nature of the bureaucratic class. It enables one to circumscribe a privileged stratum; but factory managers and those officials responsible for planning are not the only members of the dominant class, nor do all privileged individuals necessarily belong to it. Just as in the context of the industrial firm a mere foreman, in contrast to an engineer, can be regarded as a bureaucrat because authority has been delegated to him and he identifies with management rather than the workers, so too, at the level of society as a whole, a particular category of political or union functionaries can be placed in the bureaucracy whereas some category of technicians, although receiving higher salaries, does not belong to the dominant class, does not espouse its values and does not adhere to its ideals. The social nature of the bureaucracy cannot be deduced from its economic function; it must be observed in order to be understood. But even when observation is not possible, the question posed here has the merit of avoiding a schematic conception of history. In the USSR, as in Western countries, there is more than a single class confronting the industrial and agricultural proletariat. The bureaucracy does not consist of the working class as a whole, nor simply of several thousand or tens of thousands of leaders supported by the political police: one can define it only by describing the solidarity which unites its members and crystallizes them in the function of domination.

It is possible, nonetheless, to point to certain characteristics of this class, both by means of reflection on the principle of its constitution and by drawing on the testimonies of observers or of political leaders conscious of the difficulties that the regime must confront. I shall restrict myself to two remarks. The first is that the bureaucracy implies a model of social participation which is different from that of the bourgeoisie. Bureaucrats do not become elements of a dominant class by virtue of a professional activity which endows them with private power. If a power can be established which manages society in their name, it is not because their individual interests happen to coincide. They are first of all members of their class and their personal attributes follow from this membership; they are what they are only through their dependence on the state power which grounds and maintains the social hierarchy. In other words, political power

and economic power are fused within the bureaucratic class, so that to participate in the appropriation of surplus value is at the same time to participate in a system of domination. The bureaucracy is thus the privileged terrain of totalitarianism, that is, of a regime where all social activities are measured by a single criterion of validity established by the power of the state; the plurality of systems of behaviour and value immediately pose a threat not only to the status of a ruling minority but to the dominant class itself, whose integration depends entirely on its submission to the established power.

My second remark is that, in spite of the constantly reaffirmed tendency to make a single authority prevail at every level, the bureaucracy cannot avoid conflicts which not only set clans against one another within a particular institutional context (as I have tried to show), but also set bureaucracies against one another. For if the analysis sketched above is correct, bureaucracy exists in a developed form within the limits of a mass institution – in the party, in the union, in some particular branch of production or cultural sector; in each of these contexts it seeks to expand, to take hold of an increasing share of social capital and to divide up a field of power which is as extended as possible. Bureaucracies are not attuned by virtue of a pre-established harmony. Class unity does not prevail ‘naturally’: it requires a constant activity of unification. The rivalry of bureaucratic apparatuses reinforced by the struggle of inter-bureaucratic clans is brought under control only by the intervention, at every level and in all sectors of social life, of a principle which is properly political. But the party which bears this principle is itself the most extensive and complete bureaucracy. If, on the one hand, class unity is inconceivable in its absence and if its mediating role ‘politicizes’ society as a whole and fuses the sphere of the state with that of civil society, on the other hand its presence and its natural tendency to control and subordinate everything to its own power produces the most acute tension within the dominant class. The bureaucratic system is thus engaged in an interminable trial with itself, a trial which exposes it to conflicts that are of a different kind but are no less formidable than those familiar to bourgeois regimes.

To maintain that the bureaucracy forms a dominant class in the USSR does not settle the question of its status in the large industrial nations of the West. From one point of view, the formation of a bureaucratic class seems like an extension of the bureaucratic organizations which flourish in the context of mass institutions, a

process facilitated by the development of techniques which render human activities more and more dependent on one another and impose a socialization of administrative tasks comparable to that which occurs in the sphere of production. From another point of view, this class seems to require a mode of political integration, a mode of subordination to state power of such a kind that one could say that it has set up nothing less than a total system of domination. At a deeper level, these two points of view are not incompatible; they allow us to see bureaucracy - or better, bureaucracies - as a type of social behaviour whose success or failure is not given in advance but depends on a whole complex of properly historical conditions, stemming from a prior history and open to change. It is conceivable *both* that bureaucratic organizations have an affinity for a particular regime, where the definitive elimination of private property provides them with a maximum field for development and secures their integration into a new class structure, *and* that, immersed in bourgeois society and hindered in their growth by their natural conservatism as well as by the profits which they derive from the established mode of production, they prove incapable of doing more than invading bourgeois society, that is, incapable of transforming the systems of power. In other words, there are no grounds for maintaining that, in the absence of a radical social upheaval which would sweep away the established regimes (as happened in Russia by a workers' and peasants' revolution, and in the people's democracies by a war), bureaucratic organizations would naturally overcome their divisions and integrate themselves around a new state apparatus, as the elements of a dominant class.

This leads me to emphasize the *indeterminacy* of bureaucracy, which seems to me to be at the source of the difficulties encountered by the theoretical accounts. The bureaucracy is not a class so long as it is not the dominant class; and when it becomes so, it remains essentially dependent on a properly political activity of unification.

To maintain that bureaucrats already form a class within society as a whole would imply that they are differentiated by their particular interests, their style of life or the values to which they adhere. But they are in fact differentiated by their mode of group formation and by the way in which they acquire their status as members of a collectivity. These features are obviously crucial; the relations among bureaucrats within each institution correspond to a specific social model and anticipate a new overall structure. But so long as this

structure is not realized, the bureaucracy does not constitute a world apart; bourgeois society assimilates it. It is not enough to point out that senior civil servants are company directors or that the upper levels of management derive part of their salary from the shares which they own, for this phenomenon of embourgeoisement can be compared to the aristocratization of the bourgeoisie, which at certain periods rushed to buy land and noble titles. What is important is that, on the one hand, the difference in the appropriation of wealth is linked neither to the nature of production nor even to the deepest relations which stem from it, while on the other hand, in the context of society as a whole, the various bureaucracies develop along the lines of traditional cleavage, thus remaining heterogeneous (despite the inter-penetration of some of them) and unaware of their identity (at least in the absence of a social crisis). Moreover, this 'polycentrism', which is part of the essence of bureaucracy, destined as it is to crystallize in particular institutions, works to prevent the formation of a class unity.

Even when this unity is attained, the bureaucracy preserves a principle of indetermination. For it does not have an objective existence rigorously separable from a social form of power; at the deepest level, it is not an economic category but is constituted through participation in a system of domination.

Hence there is a strong temptation to deny that the bureaucracy forms a class in those societies where it is seen to rule, or a specific social milieu where it is seen to multiply itself within bourgeois societies. Or if, on the contrary, one maintains that it is the dominant class in the USSR, one tends to neglect or to regard as secondary its distinctive constitution: namely, *the change in the function of politics* in bureaucratic society, the heterogeneity of organizations, the struggle between apparatuses and groups, the different ways and degrees to which the various constitutive strata are integrated into the class; above all, one tends to see in this class a model which is in the process of being realized everywhere, as if bourgeois society had to transform itself *naturally* into bureaucratic society under the pressure of the concentration of capital. One is struck by the parallel growth of economic rationalization and bureaucratization, one assumes that one is the manifestation of the other, failing to see that rationalization occurs in the context of a system based on exploitation and that bureaucratization is the reordering of a system of domination. In highlighting the phenomenon of bureaucratic

parasitism, one overlooks the fact that in one and the same movement the bureaucracy establishes itself at the heart of social life and presents itself as an end, that it responds to a technical need and subordinates it to the imperative of power.

The study of bureaucracy, and the discussion that it calls for, will be fruitful only if we reject these simplifications. The important questions can then be asked; and we may hope to make some progress in answering them only if, it seems to me, we observe a few principles.

- 1 Attention must be given to the various specific bureaucracies instead of immediately swallowing them up in a concept which can then be applied so freely that it is stripped of all content.
- 2 Bureaucracy must be approached as a *social* formation, as a system of meaningful behaviour, and not simply as a formal system of organization. This perspective requires one to offer a genetic definition of the phenomenon and to see it as a human project endowed with its own goal.
- 3 It is essential to examine the relations that the bureaucracy maintains with other social strata and especially the relations between the bureaucratic group and other groups within the context of a specific institution.
- 4 From the social nature of bureaucracy (I would prefer to say its *sociality*) one cannot deduce a future course of development, for that depends on a whole complex of historical conditions in which established structures and events are determinant.
- 5 In raising the question of the class nature of bureaucracy, one must not allow the answer (whatever it may be) to be dictated by a comparison between the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy. One must seek to describe the specific way in which the bureaucracy is involved in society as a whole and the connections between the *political, economic and cultural* determinations within it, instead of falling back on an *a priori* definition of class (which is ascribed a universal significance although in fact it pertained to the bourgeoisie in the middle of the nineteenth century) and an *a priori* account of the elements of class which are essential as distinct from those which are accidental.
- 6 In the context of an inquiry into a particular bureaucracy, the representation that the great bureaucrats offer of themselves must not be accepted at face value. Instead, one should try to circumscribe the milieu and to define the bureaucratic attitudes and

behaviour by listening to those who know them, those who are not easily misled by the bureaucrats and who, in being dominated by them, form the basis upon which the bureaucrats become what they are.