

Administrative Corruption (1977) Revisited

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Reflecting on their article written in 1977, the authors find that their critique of the revisionist theory of corruption should have been more forceful, should not have been limited to administrative corruption, and should have been more focused on public accountability and trust. They reiterate that systemic corruption damages the public and harms public interests. Their challenge is that people must recognize that the weapons against it are in their hands.

Introduction

Among the few papers on which we have collaborated, the first was "Administrative Corruption" published in *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 37 No. 3, May-June 1977, pp. 301-9. Until then we had kept our work quite separate. So this was an experiment for us in editing each other's drafts. More importantly, we both felt strongly about the terrible fraud and waste in the public sector foisted on an unsuspecting and trusting public attributable to corruption. While the participants (and their causes) benefited, it was at the expense of people less well connected, less willing to indulge in immoral behavior, less selfish and egocentric, people deprived of their just due and unfairly discriminated against. Corruption caused much needless social friction and divisiveness and on occasion contributed to disastrous tragedies, including military defeat, shortened life spans, starvation and all manner of human indignities. Not surprisingly, faith and confidence in public institutions were diminishing.

Yet some respectable scholars were telling us not to be so passionate, so angry, so enraged, so accusatory. We were asked not to be so idealistic, so moralistic, so involved, so righteous, so hard on corruption as clearly it met human needs, it had good in it as well as bad, it rewarded the enterprising, and it might even be for the best. These excuses rang hollow in our ears. Wrong could not be made into right. But maybe we were mistaken. We had better review the case of these revisionists as they came to be called. We had better study the facts and see whether corruption could be functional as claimed and under what circumstances. So we joined together and went over the evidence. We concluded.

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that while the revisionists had raised legitimate questions and presented novel arguments, there was little if any substantive proof of their (the revisionists') side. Corruption did benefit those who could privatize the public's business but it was dysfunctional for society. It caused more harm than good. The revisionists had better be told of this in no uncertain fashion and they had better come up with a better case if they were to have any credibility.

We fired our shot which was not strong enough to halt the momentum of the revisionists. For a while, the profession of public administration was split and could not decide definitively whom to believe. But the tide had turned and the revisionists no longer had the reception they once did. Although corruption still rewards the corrupt handsomely, its dysfunctionality has become increasingly apparent since the mid-1970s and the profession has swung heavily against it. Indeed, there is now alarm that insufficient action has been taken to combat it and to ensure that new generations of public administrators realize that public service norms exclude such misconduct and malpractice. Codes of ethics are being written and revised and public employees are being formally instructed on what is expected of them. The profession has taken on the difficult task of finding better ways to combat and root out corrupt practices. It would like the powers-that-be to give its efforts less lip-service and become more serious about adopting anti-corruption measures and cleaning up their own houses.

Background

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, we were both involved in detailed studies of financial corruption and abuse in the public sector, political corruption in development administration, and career corruption in criminal justice systems. We were offended by so many unprosecuted looters (kleptocrats) in public office who had unashamedly dishonored public trust and systematically diverted public resources into their own private schemes. They used their positions to victimize and hound out of public life justifiable accusers and whistleblowers. For them, corruption clearly paid off. Villains were heralded as benefactors while potential benefactors were branded villains. Morality had been turned on its head. Valiant efforts to seek justice for the public were thwarted and secreted, rarely noticed by an indulgent mass media.

Every now and then, justice was done as public hue and cry made sure that the real villains were prosecuted and their accusers were heralded as heroes. An upset and aroused public demanded and received assurances that such intolerable goings-on in the public realm would be stopped. Perpetrators would be hunted down and thrown out of public office which they did not deserve to hold. Changes would be initiated and every effort would be made to prevent any recurrence. To show action, some principals would be charged, held accountable for their misdeeds, and thrown out of office. Yet, within years, sometimes only months,

their replacements would be up to exactly the same tricks, even worse, without drawing public attention. The game had not changed; only the players were different. How could this be, unless the malpractices had become the norm and not the exception?

Delving deeper into these curiosities, we found some odd and unexpected things. First, some players did not believe they were doing any wrong. They were merely doing what they had been instructed to do and what was expected of them. The real world of public administration did not conform to the ideals of moralists and not everything could be done according to the book. To get results, one had to accommodate, compromise, deviate, bend, connive, cooperate, join, assist, shield. It was not pretty, but that was how things were, and there was no alternative. These realists always gave reasons, explanation, excuses, justifications (and justifiers) galore. Their motivation was not self-interest but, on the contrary, the highest moral motives that outweighed any petty wrongdoing that might be involved.

Second, others knew what they were doing was wrong but they were personally blameless; they were helpless victims. At the outset, they had been offended and upset at the wrongdoing they were expected to engage in or at least turn a blind eye to. Since, they had come to realize that they were caught up in something much bigger, something they had no control over, something they could do nothing about. So, in time, their moral susceptibilities had been blunted and anesthetized. Their wisest course had been to go along, turn away, and avoid doing anything really bad. Eventually, they had been so accustomed, so socialized, so brain-washed, to the way things were that they no longer saw them for what they were, at least to outsiders who had not gone through the same conforming pressures. They just pleaded powerlessness and self-deception.

Third, a few, an influential few, always could find good in evil. Everything was for the best (or the better); there was a silver lining in every cloud. Yes, they argued, what was being done was inexcusable, but in this particular case, it reduced potential violence, it promoted change quicker, prevented even greater evil, redistributed spoils, rewarded initiative, and so forth. More sophisticatedly, they argued that if corruption was institutionalized, if it was the usual way of conducting public business, it could no longer be considered corruption but just another different way of conducting public business which was proper—not wrong—where such practices were the norm. Who could set themselves up as the supreme judge to say definitively what was right or wrong for any society for all time? Such egoists were imposing their own values on everybody else, and they had no right to do so. Thus, corruption was dismissed as cultural imperialism that had no place in the scientific community; people offended by the outcomes should reserve their moral indignation for their own society.

These arguments sounded familiar. They were not new in theology and philosophy, nor novel to sociology or psychology. They had certainly cropped up in

economics and political science. Yet in public administration there seemed to be a moral numbness creeping over areas we were studying, part of a concerted movement to eliminate considerations of values, morals and subjectivity from the social sciences altogether. We suspected that, perhaps unknowingly, some scholars were being coopted by corrupt regimes to excuse or justify or legitimize or rationalize their misdeeds; in their way, they were being corrupted for their own motives or for their share of honors, travel grants, publications and other spoils in their association with the rich and powerful. Perish the thought! So what was behind the revisionists who held that corruption could be (and in fact was) functional as well as dysfunctional? What case did they have to back their assertions? In any event, why had so little about corruption found its way into any major textbook in public administration and public service training? Was there a conspiracy of silence? If corruption was being downplayed, would it be taken at all seriously by novices?

We were not taking corruption lightly. Naomi J. Caiden had joined Aaron Wildavsky in writing *Planning and Budgeting in Poor Countries* (1974) which had demonstrated the emptiness of national planning. Not for publication had been the interviews with senior planners admitting they had faked figures, invented estimates, and manipulated data to produce fictitious plans billed as state-of-the-art sophisticated calculations. International bodies had accepted them at face value even though experts had doubted their veracity and the plans had been used to justify grants and loans to regimes which had diverted the monies to feather their nests. It resembled a sophisticated institutionalized shell game, the major losers being the world's poor. Not only had the poor lost the projects for which the monies had been obtained but they had also been forced to pay their elites' debts. All this was apart from regular scandals in tax collection, fraudulent projects and disappearing public assets, the proceeds of which were secreted away mostly in private accounts in rich countries whose passivity condoned such looting of poor countries. Yet it seemed that some development experts who knew the facts were justifying such corrupt practices as functional for poor countries when in reality they were perpetuating mass impoverishment.

Gerald Caiden had observed similar looting of international aid programs and their use as bribes to leaders of poor countries to support the donors in international councils. He had, like many others in post-Watergate Washington, reexamined political corruption and the reluctance of career public servants to stand up to their unscrupulous political bosses. He had maintained a growing list of white elephant projects in the United States and abroad whereby scarce public resources had been frittered away. He had been particularly struck by numerous U.S. government programs faultily designed to be exploited without regard to outcomes and the indifference with which program staff continued to shovel out money regardless of the poor value obtained. He had studied closely American police agencies and the regularity with which they were plagued by scandal and corruption. He had come to distinguish between corruption attributable to rotten

apples and rotten barrels that contaminated good apples. Good police agencies were disgraced by corrupt cops but bad departments corrupted straight cops. The literature appeared to recognize the one but not the other.

In 1976, we joined forces to challenge the alleged functionality of corruption and to articulate the concept of systemic or institutionalized corruption as opposed to individual corruption. Coming from a disciplinary background of public administration, we concentrated on administrative corruption and designed our findings specifically for the leading American journal in the field, *Public Administration Review*, as a research comment rather than a main article. Consequently, it appeared relatively quickly, actually coincidentally with Gerald Caiden's *Police Revitalization* (Lexington Books 1977) which elaborated the concept of systemic corruption. Supporting evidence for its argument was given in several subsequent articles, papers and book reviews.

Argument

The research note began by reviewing the case of the revisionists who disputed the traditional view that administrative corruption was individual and therefore incidental. It could not be tackled as claimed by merely dismissing offenders. Rather, corruption was structural; it was rooted in the mores and institutions of society. As these differed, practices considered corrupt in the Western world might actually fulfill economic, political, and administrative needs of non-Western countries better. Definitions largely based on Western norms of public conduct, such as those which regarded corruption as being self-interested departures from the public interest or as being derelictions of public duty, were rejected as being too imprecise, judgmental and absolute, too Western, and, above all, too bureaucratic. Why should legal norms eclipse cultural norms? Instead, the revisionists preferred definitions that regarded corruption as informal allocative and decisionmaking systems, extra-legal institutions to influence inadequate bureaucracy unable to meet demands placed on it. Corruption prevailed more in non-Western poor countries because in them there was a gap between inherited Western law and informal social norms, between its derived government and the native culture of society, between the alien rational, impersonal and universalistic norms of Western bureaucracy and kinship bonds, i.e., personalistic and familistic outlooks. So-called corruption appeared to be consistent with customs and traditions while the law and bureaucratic ethics that made it illegal and immoral were alien or superimposed.

According to the revisionists, corruption arose economically because market mechanisms reasserted themselves over centralized allocative mechanisms which broke down because of the great disparity between supply and demand, and politically because there was inadequate access to power, too few political channels and too heavy a burden for political institutions to carry in terms of

capacity and legitimacy. So-called corruption could be attributed to the preponderance of government in society and the lack of alternatives to it together with a weak sense of nationhood. It should really be seen as pressure group influence after rather than before legislation because of the unrepresentative nature of government, i.e., a temporary measure until political modernization and greater economic opportunity were attained. As such, it functioned in the place of violence. Indeed, it performed other necessary social functions such as surmounting both traditional and bureaucratic laws, reducing uncertainty in decisionmaking, ensuring greater bureaucratic responsiveness, cutting red-tape, unstifling private initiatives, offering higher incentives to entrepreneurs, stabilizing government, securing elites and strengthening political parties which would eventually reduce the need for and therefore the prevalence of corruption.

In sum, poor countries for cultural and historical reasons have a propensity toward corruption, seen as a violation of Western norms. To this propensity may be added a breakdown in the allocative mechanisms of society, for economic, political, and administrative reasons, so that corruption steps in to fulfill the missing functions. Corruption is thus legitimized in terms of its prevalence, and of its functionality: indeed, given the inappropriateness of Western norms and inadequacy of Western institutions, corruption does not really exist at all. It is simply a different way of doing public business. Thus, the revisionists' had by sleight of hand made corruption disappear, simply by defining it as practices that had become so widespread to be normal rather than exceptional.

Just because malpractices had become a way of life did not make them disappear or change their nature. They never had. Long before Western bureaucracy, corruption existed. Corruption did not suddenly appear with the eighteenth century conceptualization of public office as a public trust to be used in the public interest and of government employees as servants of the community. The rise of the modern administrative state did help to distinguish private from public and acceptable from unacceptable public conduct. It also promoted the identification of public malpractices and their being made illegal. They did not cease because they had been delegitimized. But what had once been commonplace now became exceptional to the public's benefit. Corruption had always been regarded as wrong, unfortunate, despicable. Moreover, largely the same forms of public malpractice had been identified and condemned throughout the ages, going back to some five thousand years of recorded human history. Because regime after regime had indulged in them and had been unable to prevent them did not make them acceptable or right. On this there could be little dispute or ambiguity.

The same could not be said for the revisionists' case. For a start, their stance was riddled with ambiguities, semantically and methodologically. As they viewed corruption as a function of a system that could not accommodate change, it was to them a functional dysfunction whereby new (functional) norms replaced outmoded norms. But the new norms were in fact the old pre-Western, pre-development

norms or rather the breakdown of the traditional norms (held by so-called "traditional" man) impacted by Western-style development. It was never explained how the new norms were evolved and what kind of norms they would be. Even so, nowhere had the revisionists shown how the norms of corruption had accommodated social change. In the West, they had failed to do so. The entrenchment of corruption had prevented needed social changes from taking place in an orderly fashion, i.e., the more corrupt practices had prevailed, the more they had impeded peaceful change. Change had not come from the inside but from the outside, from reformers (and revolutionaries) providing innovation and new norms.

Though corruption might prove functional to the interests of certain individuals and groups, and to the system insofar as it shares those interests, its very functionality is a symptom or indication of the need for reform. Corruption does not disappear when it becomes entrenched and accepted: rather it assumes a different form, that of *systemic* as opposed to *individual* corruption.

Although the revisionists recognized corruption as a social fact with structural causes and consequences, they still thought of it in individual terms, e.g., informal organizational short cuts, personal accommodations and mutual understandings. They did not envisage systemic corruption where wrongdoing was the norm and public responsibility and trust unwarranted. Corruption might be so regularized and institutionalized that organizational supports backed wrongdoing and actually penalized honesty and integrity. Such systemic corruption could be found whenever societies prized organizational loyalty over the public interest, where standards of public rectitude and integrity had been eroded, and where notions of public responsibility and trust had been thrust aside by the exploitation of public office for private gain. In systemic corruption,

- (1) the organization professes an external code of ethics which is contradicted by internal practices;
- (2) internal practices encourage, abet, and hide violations of the external code;
- (3) non-violators are penalized by foregoing the rewards of violation and offending violators;
- (4) violators are protected, and when exposed, treated leniently; their accusers are victimized for exposing organizational hypocrisy, and are treated harshly;
- (5) non-violators suffocate in the venal atmosphere; they find no internal relief and much external disbelief;
- (6) prospective whistle-blowers are intimidated and terrorized into silence;

- (7) courageous whistle-blowers have to be protected from organizational retaliation;
- (8) violators become so accustomed to their practices and the protection given them that, on exposure they evidence surprise and claim innocence and unfair discrimination against them;
- (9) collective guilt finds expression in rationalizations of the internal practices and without strong external supports there is no serious intention of ending them;
- (10) those formally charged with revealing corruption rarely act and, when forced by external pressure to do so, excuse any incidents as isolated, rare occurrences (Caiden and Caiden 1977:306-7).

Here, few corrupt practices can be conducted without collusion, collaboration and common knowledge.

Yet the revisionists claimed that if corruption had been so institutionalized then it could no longer be considered corruption. It was merely the operational norm of public administration that did all manner of beneficial acts for society. But against this argument, if one were to reduce the term to specific practices (or malpractices), the individual acts would be found despicable and their institutionalization dysfunctional to society. They involved theft, fraud, extortion, bribery, deceit, hypocrisy, false testimony, i.e., mostly indictable offenses. While individual offenders could be rooted out through organizational sanctions, systemic corruption could not be handled that way. The people might be replaced, but the same practices would continue. Thus, systemic corruption impeded rather than aided change. Examined more closely, systemic corruption was far from being functional. It was dysfunctional to society in the following ways:

- (1) It perpetuated closed politics and restricted access, preventing the reflection of social change in political institutions.
- (2) It suppressed opposition thereby contributing to increased resentment. Far from being an alternative to violence, it was often accompanied by more violence.
- (3) It perpetuated and widened class, economic, and social divisions, contributing to societal strain and preventing cohesion.
- (4) It prevented policy change, particularly where this worked against immediate market considerations. Individual or sectional interests were not the best guide to the public interest.

- (5) It blocked administrative reform, and made deleterious administrative practices profitable.
- (6) It diverted public resources and contributed to private affluence and public squalor, especially serious where affluence was confined to a few.
- (7) It contributed to societal anomie in shoring up or transmuted traditional values into inappropriate areas.
- (8) It had an accumulator effect on public perceptions and expectations which subverted trust and cooperation far beyond those directly involved (Caiden and Caiden 1977:307-8).

In this, Western and non-Western countries suffered alike. The issue for public administration was not so much individual misconduct but the institutionalized subvention of the public interest through systemic corruption. That needed to be the focus of further research, not the unsubstantiated claims of the revisionists. It would probably confirm Gunnar Myrdal's (1968) thesis about soft states and their inability to get things done that they needed to get done because of their systemic corruption.

Reflections

If we had to write the piece again, what would we do differently? For a start, we would not write so academically. Rereading the research note, it is still hard to grasp the argument. We were too subtle and in places too clever by far. We were too gentle with the revisionists and given all the accumulated evidence since we could have afforded to be more forceful. We had written a critical overview rather than a definitive assault or our own reconstruction of this area of the discipline. We had the courage of our convictions but *Public Administration Review* did not seem the appropriate place or venue for a polemic. Herbert Simon (1957) had once written a polemic on American administrative theory in one of the first issues of that journal and he had not been allowed to forget it. We should have clarified parts of the argument and spent more space on our assertions about the nature and characteristics of systemic corruption with examples and other supporting evidence.

A more fundamental error had been to confine ourselves almost entirely to administrative corruption. We had deliberately done so in deference to the journal's readership which consisted predominantly of public service professionals. We guessed that few would want to read about disputes between rival researchers in development administration although we had tried to interest public professionals in general to think about systemic corruption in which they (public

professionals) might find themselves involved. We hoped that by outlining the nature and characteristics of systemic corruption they would realize it was more widespread and dangerous in public administration than individual corruption with which they were more familiar. We wanted them to focus more on rotten barrels than rotten apples.

We had not defined what we had meant by administrative corruption and how administrative corruption could be differentiated from other forms of corruption. We knew that administrative corruption was closely linked to political corruption and we should have discussed the ties. One could not be considered apart from the other. They are like two sides of the same coin. Systemic corruption clearly demonstrates their combination and amalgamation. Whereas individual corruption can be hidden and possibly never brought to light, systemic corruption can only be hidden with the greatest difficulty. There are just too many people involved, too many who must know, too many who can talk to somebody else about what they know, too many who are probably troubled and whose consciences bother them, too many who cannot breathe easily when someone is sacrificed to assuage public opinion, too many aware of the travesty in public accountability and trust. Whereas individual corruption can be tackled through organizational sanctions, systemic corruption cannot because the sanctions do not work at all or not well enough. The whole organization's culture that aids and abets systemic corruption has to be revamped, together possibly with reforms in the governmental and political systems which allow such malpractices to persist. One has to get to the roots of a governance system to discover why individual integrity is deliberately and knowingly compromised, even abandoned, in the pursuit presumably of higher objectives more valued by the community, an issue which the revisionists raised but did not pursue far enough.

Another related issue which we excluded was that of public accountability and trust. There were kleptocrats who on being caught offered to return all their ill-gotten gains and more. This way, they believed, nobody could be said to have lost anything through their misbehavior. This, so the revisionists described, was victimless crime par excellence; nobody suffered and the public actually gained when more was returned than taken, i.e., "no harm, no foul." But, of course, the harm was just in the taking because it took advantage of public trust and it abused public accountability; the intent of embezzlement was clear. We should have clearly demonstrated this and shown how each specific act of corruption was immoral and probably unlawful, certainly a violation of public trust, accountability and responsibility, victimizing everybody and calling into question the integrity of every public official, innocent and guilty alike. All diversions of public funds, all public monies spent on things not officially sanctioned, disbursed and allocated, all misuse and abuse of public office, fall into this category. There may not have been criminal intent or actual breach of the law, but there was a deliberate evasion of public accountability and trust.

Had we taken such a path, sooner or later we would have had to confront wrong actions or malpractices taken for the right moral reasons. These are situations where individuals do bad things to prevent far greater wickedness taking place, i.e., corruption in a good cause. For example, guards who steal or take bribes to keep prisoners from certain death. If people have to abandon their integrity, they are caught in systemic corruption. They cannot be faulted for doing the right thing when the whole rotten system turns truth on its head. A prison system that deliberately starves its inmates to death, that pursues an inhuman public policy, is so obviously wrong and rotten that those brave enough to defy it should be honored and not blamed. That it prevails and so many people are employed implementing such a policy does not make this example of systemic corruption any less corrupt, functional or acceptable. The revisionists may have had a stronger case had they emphasized the fact that most poor countries, which were their concern, were autocracies, kleptocracies, dictatorships, theocracies and other suchlike unrepresentative regimes pursuing self-aggrandizement and that, as the revisionists partly argued, corruption was necessary to guide them in better directions, reduce their harmful outcomes and divert scarce resources into more rewarding social avenues. Few revisionists argued this way.

Instead, they merely described systemically corrupt systems and explained what took place in them without taking the moral high ground.

Aftermath

Whenever an article is published, it is difficult to gauge reactions. In this case, the phone rang the moment the article was published, indeed even before we had received a copy of the journal issue. We had stirred up interest but no rebuttal came. The revisionists continued to claim that whether corruption was good or bad depended on the context and that it was an expected phase en route to modernization; it would eventually decline with maturity. But their case grew increasingly hollow. First, the Western world and the so-called developed countries were shaken by scandals that showed that they were not free of corruption and they were afflicted with much more systemic corruption than they suspected. True, Westerners had corrupted the non-Western world but during the late 1970s the non-Western world had been exploiting corruption in the West. Foreign-induced corruption was by no means one way. Nonetheless, the great bulk was home-grown. Corruption in rich countries was not so crude and raw as in poor countries but it was just as pervasive and on a scale possibly exceeding many Third World countries. This was clear even before revelations about massive systemic corruption in the East Bloc became fully known in the 1980s. Modernized countries were no less susceptible.

Second, as the scale and scope of worldwide corruption came to be known its dysfunctions could not be dismissed or overlooked. No matter how development

was defined, it was being handicapped by the diversion of scarce resources into the wrong hands and for the wrong ventures, by the perversions of law and justice, by the large numbers of identifiable victims and by declining faith in public institutions. Until the mid-1970s increasing global wealth had disguised gross disparities in distribution and rising living standards had muted criticism. Thereafter, the slowing down and eventual decline in the world economy revealed the widening gap between rich and poor, the extent of underground economies and black markets, the reach of global organized crime, and the manipulation and exploitation of honest folk by the dishonest folk with the right connections. While conspicuous corruption became more apparent, value from public goods and services was diminishing.

Third, the taboo of silence that usually hid corruption was increasingly strained and eventually breached in several places. The revisionists had made the subject more respectable for social science research. While they had not opened the floodgates, more and more public figures began to speak out about corruption in their midst. The small band of scholars who had concentrated on corruption was being joined by a horde of post-Watergate investigative journalists who often threw scruple to the wind. They were aided by a widening band of professional corruption hunters particularly after the newly established Independent Commission Against Corruption in Hong Kong had such initial success. Then in 1978 whistleblowing was legally recognized for the first time (in the Carter Administration's civil service reforms in the USA), whistle blowers were to be protected, and special inspectors-general were appointed to hunt down corruption and to take whistleblowers seriously. The revolution in communications was making it much more difficult to hide corruption or prevent its exposure by free mass media which found a ready audience entertained by such iconoclasm. Even where mass media were not free, repressive measures had an unexpected way of backfiring. Corruption could no longer be hidden.

Thus, within six years of the our piece appearing, *Public Administration Review* published Simcha Werner's "New Directions in the Study of Administrative Corruption" (1983:146-54) in which he could record that the functionalist school of corruption of the 1960s had been superseded by the post functionalist school of the 1970s. In contrast to the revisionists who had argued that corruption was doomed to self-destruction with the natural maturation process, the post-functionalists asserted that corruption fed on various causes and it was self-perpetuating. Descriptive studies had demonstrated that the functionalists had mistakenly lulled the world with their functional myth. The post-functionalists warned that there was a pressing need for multi-dimensional strategies to tackle corruption which only served itself. As it became institutionalized and systemic, corruption, quoting Naomi Caiden, involves "the loss of moral authority, weakens efficiency of government operations, increases opportunities for organized crime, encourages police brutality, adds to (the) taxpayers' burden . . . undermines political decisions, leads to inefficient use of

resources, and benefits the unscrupulous at the cost of the law abiding" (Werner 1983: 149).

As it grew, it had various spillover effects as followers copied their leaders' bad example, its trivialization legitimized worse forms of public misconduct, and its ready reproduction crippled organizational effectiveness. Its dysfunctionalities required community containment strategies within a more sophisticated theoretical and methodologically comparative framework.

If Werner (1983) was correct, then the revisionists were in hasty retreat. The tide had turned against them. Moreover, corruption, far from declining, would grow more threatening and menacing unless organizations, governments and societies took strong action to confront it. The 1980s confirmed that the revisionists became muted although as long as the beneficiaries of corruption found comfort and refuge in their arguments they would not be routed. And corruption seemed to explode, or maybe the reporting of corruption exploded. Not a day seemed to pass without the revelation somewhere of a scandal in high places. Not even the highest have escaped—monarchs, presidents, high priests, scientists, diplomats, all have been accused. Not even the most respected public organization has escaped—Scotland Yard and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Way, international aid programs and poor peoples' housing projects, disease control activities and refugee relief schemes, all have proven vulnerable. Publications on corruption, once scarce, were made more freely available, including anti-corruption literature and videos put out by international authorities. Few thought they would live to see the day when even the Italian government would start to cleanse itself to eradicate the notorious Mafia, two long standing examples of systemic corruption.

The Bottom Line

Corruption is the illegitimate and unethical use of public office for personal and private advantage. It covers abuses of public authority that offend, unprincipled conduct that is shameful, and uses of public power that exploit. It includes all forms of deviation from commonly accepted standards of rectitude and integrity expected of persons placed in authority over the community to shape its destiny, guide its fortunes and set the example for the next generation. It is the intentional misperformance, transgression and neglect of recognized official duties that damage the public and harm public interests. It is self-perpetuating and expandable. If left unchecked, it will eventually destroy a society. Yet,

- (1) corruption is the norm, common to all regimes, economies, and societies, being endemic, chronic and pervasive, a regular, repetitive, integral part of politics, and a universal, widespread and enduring problem;

- (2) corruption is unavoidable simply because of human frailty and organizational imperfection although it remains inexcusable: it is not a question of existence but whether it is known, discoverable, petty, confined, peripheral, tolerable and acceptable, depending on what forms it takes, who indulges, and what are the social consequences;
- (3) corruption is highly contagious, in which everyone involved conspires to hide his or her wrongdoing and contributes to its growth;
- (4) corruption is expanding, as the opportunities for self-enrichment in public office in the modern administrative state grow in the global society given sufficient ingenuity and mindless of squandering wherever demand exceeds supply;
- (5) corruption is expected, simply because its clients suspect that private advantage is the mainspring which moves public government and the exchange of favors is the incentive for people to stay in politics and the means by which they maintain their influence.

If so, people are not surprised by corruption; they expect it and accommodate to it as best they can. Thus varying degrees of acceptance result in varying degrees of participation. Hence, people may very well get the kind of official conduct they ask or vote for.

Take Italy. While we were finalizing this paper, *The New Yorker* in its 1 March 1993 issue, published a "Letter From Palermo" entitled "The Mafia's Biggest Mistake" (pp. 60-73) about popular reaction to the murders of the anti-Mafia prosecutors Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino. The public had at last been so stung that it had turned around. Now, instead of tolerating so much corruption, it demanded effective government action to be taken against the Mafia which had for so long penetrated the ruling Christian Democratic Party via patronage. It called for a thorough national house cleansing in all political parties and public offices. There has since followed large numbers of arrests of leading public figures in the political and administrative arenas. What is coming to light is the extent of the Mafia's control of public life and business, particularly in Sicily and Palermo with the prosecution of mayors, parliamentarians and senior police officials. The following extract from the letter describes systemic corruption at work:

For many years, most Italians underestimated the power of the Mafia, considering it a primitive, archaic organization that would gradually disappear as Italy modernized and the economic level of Sicily approached that of the rest of Italy. Instead, the Mafia has proved an extremely vigorous virus, able to adapt itself perfectly to the modern Italian welfare state. Political parties in Italy control almost every aspect of economic life, running the vast industries and handing out hundreds of thousands of jobs—to everyone from the mightiest bank president to the lowliest street-

sweeper. Government spending accounts for fifty-two percent of the gross national product, and in southern Italy, which has almost no private industry, the figure is seventy percent. To create electoral consensus, the government funded pharaonic and often useless building projects—superhighways leading nowhere, dams without water, seaports without ships, factories that never opened. These projects created jobs, enriched a series of unscrupulous entrepreneurs, and provided a perfect vehicle for Mafia infiltration. By corruption and physical intimidation, Mafia-controlled firms took their share of public contracts, either directly or through subcontracts and dummy companies.

This proved such a “winning” model that it spread throughout southern Italy, to towns and provinces that had once been free of organized crime. In many areas, democracy as we know it ceased to exist. In the last two years, the Italian Ministry of the Interior has dissolved the elected governments of forty-five towns in the south, because their city councils were found to have been polluted by the Mafia. For several years, the town of Plati, in Calabria, had no city council, because people were too afraid to run for office or to vote. And corruption was not limited to small towns. Last summer virtually the entire city council of Reggio Calabria was indicted. Things reached their lowest possible point when four of the city’s most important politicians, including two former members of parliament, were indicted for ordering the Mafia killing of another politician. According to the indictment, the man was killed not because he opposed the corrupt ways of his colleagues but because he wanted a cut of the bribes being pocketed on lucrative public contracts (pp. 63-64).

After describing the awful outcomes of Mafia rule in Palermo, the letter then deals with the moral revolt in that city caused by the Falcone-Borsellino murders.

A city that had been criticized in the past for its cautious silences and passive complicity erupted in a series of protests that did not, as in the past, peter out almost as soon as the dead were buried. Since last spring, the city has been in a nearly constant state of ferment. Between the nineteenth and the twenty-third of every month—the dates of the two assassinations—people across the city hang sheets from their windows bearing messages that commemorate the victims or denounce the Mafia, while a group of women in Piazza Castelnovo, one of the city’s main squares, maintains a public fast. The demonstrators say they will continue their protests until all those who ordered and carried out the assassinations of Falcone and Borsellino are brought to justice . . .

“There has been a change of attitude,” says Marta Cimino, who helped organize the Committee of Sheets, one of the civic groups that sprouted up after the assassinations. Along with promoting public protests, the group tries to inform ordinary citizens about ways of combating the Mafia in their daily lives, like not buying contraband cigarettes, asking shopkeepers for receipts, so they can’t cheat on their taxes, and reporting not only crimes but delays and irregularities in public administration. Palermo has always had its share of political activists, but the recent demonstrations have been much broader-based, as housewives, office clerks, and shopkeepers have joined forces with students and religious groups. “I think that after the assassinations there was a sense of guilt for the lack of past reactions,” Cimino says, “In 1982, after the death of

General Dalla Chiesa, someone carried a sign that said "Here dies the hope of every honest citizen." After the death of Falcone, a demonstrator carried a sign that said "Today rises a sun that will never set. The two signs are fairly indicative of the change in the last ten years" (pp. 66-67).

As the past few years have shown, the remedies for corruption are in people's own hands; they have nobody else except themselves to blame if they stay mute and passive, if they turn their heads away, if they indulge themselves in a selfish beggar-thy-neighbor attitude, and if they continue to excuse the inexcusable, captives of a self-perpetuating evil system that does little if any good and a great deal of harm. Certainly, people in East Europe and Italy have revolted against corrupt systems whose rottenness was so thorough and deep that they fast disappeared as soon as people would take no more and withdrew their participation. They had finally come to realize with Maimonides¹ that "there is no greater obligation than the redemption of captives, for the captive is like the hungry and the thirsty and the naked, and stands in danger for his life" (Laws of Gifts to the Poor, VIII, 10). Unless we stand up against corruption, all of us will remain its captives.

Endnote

¹Jewish scholastic philosopher and rabbi, born in Spain: one of the major theologians of Judaism.

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