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# Andrew Jackson as Administrator

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THE few historians who have dealt with the subject have transmitted to posterity a vivid but not very accurate portrait of Jackson as an administrator. Accepting the traditional view of Jackson's personality, they have depicted him as impulsive, rash, and overbearing. But the representation of Jackson as an arbitrary and headstrong administrator is based almost wholly upon an examination of his early career. While the events of that period of his life tend to justify such an opinion, the Jackson who took upon himself the responsibilities of the presidency in 1829 was no longer the fiery egoist of previous years. Jackson sobered greatly in the period 1820-24, perhaps coming to realize that his reputation for hasty action could be a serious political liability. Whatever the cause, the Jackson of 1829-37 reveals quite different traits from the impetuous individual whom Marquis James so aptly termed the Border Captain. As President, Old Hickory revealed a political acumen, a tact, and an ability to achieve his ends by indirection that had been sadly lacking in his earlier years.

The fact that the spoils system first manifested itself in the federal government during his administration has also served to obscure Jackson's administrative abilities. While it is true that there was a sizable turnover of personnel during his tenure in office, it does not necessarily follow that there was a resulting decrease in the efficiency of federal administration. What later generations have come to call "spoils" was, for Jackson, a policy adopted for the sincere purpose of reform. Jackson made a real effort to insure that only those of ability and character were appointed to federal position, although he was by no means uniformly successful in achieving this result. Actually, as a result of Jackson's desire to reduce the cost of operating the federal government,

much "deadwood" was eliminated from the service and badly needed reforms were instituted in several departments. All in all, a fairly good case can be made for the thesis that federal administration improved during Jackson's administration. It was only under later Presidents that the insidious effects and the inherent viciousness of the practice of ousting the losers from office became fully manifest.

## *Concepts of Administrative Organization*

JACKSON'S period of active military service, though relatively brief, had a profound effect both upon the course of his life and upon the pattern of his thinking. The magnificent victory at New Orleans lifted him almost overnight from a comparatively obscure backwoods general to the position of the nation's most renowned warrior, and neither his retirement to civil life nor the political heights to which he subsequently rose altered Jackson's conception of himself as primarily a soldier. Martial matters were always of the utmost interest to him and his intimates knew that he much preferred the title of "General" to that of "President."

Of more immediate importance was the impact of his military training upon his later administration. Aside from the task of managing his plantation, Jackson's only administrative experience prior to his arrival at the White House was military in nature. As a result, the administrative concepts and practices with which he was familiar in the Army were carried into his civil administration which bore the impress of his experiences as a military line officer. Nowhere is this military influence more apparent than in Jackson's ideas of administrative organization and control. In some instances, a direct relationship can be shown; in others, the influence is less obvious but still unmistakable.

*Hierarchy and the Chain of Command.* There is abundant evidence that Jackson appreciated that hierarchy and chain of command are basic features of military organization. Precisely these concepts were involved in an argument in which he became embroiled, and in the course of the dispute Jackson demonstrated that he fully understood their importance for sound administration.

As Major General of the Division of the South, Jackson twice took offense at the action of the War Department in issuing orders to one of his subordinates without routing those orders through the Commanding General. In the first instance Jackson had forcefully voiced his displeasure, insisting that sound administration required that ". . . all Orders to inferiors Should pass through there [sic] Superiors; any other System tends to disorganize all the plans of the Superior, without his knowledge or consent. . . ." Unless the government desired to dispense with his services, he concluded ominously, "I trust hereafter that all orders will come directly through me to any inferior Officer within my District."<sup>1</sup>

Three years later the offense was repeated and Jackson furiously attacked. Both the civil and the military departments of the government, he said sharply, were pervaded ". . . with that regular subordination and responsibility, which at once not only beautifies, but gives regularity and system to the whole machinery; destroy one link, and you disorganize this well regulated system, and everything becomes insubordination and chaos." For this reason, it was necessary that "every military order must pass through the regular channel. . . ."<sup>2</sup> This was the only ". . . System that will produce subordination and harmony, without which an army cannot be beneficial [sic] or effective."<sup>3</sup> The action of the War Department in issuing orders to subordinates without the consent or knowledge of the superior officer struck ". . . at the very root of subordination and the discipline of the Army."<sup>4</sup> To add point to his objection, he issued an order forbidding his subordinates

to obey a command which had not passed through his headquarters.

Jackson's position was patently correct. In ignoring the chain of command, the War Department had violated one of the basic principles of administrative organization. From the viewpoint of superior and subordinate alike, the course advocated by Jackson was the only alternative to administrative chaos. Jackson's presidential administration gives unmistakable indication that his beliefs had not undergone any change. A study of his administrative practices reveals that he never deviated from the procedure of passing all orders and instructions through intermediate superior officers.

*Concentration of Function.* Administrative authority may be concentrated or integrated in two distinct ways. The first allocates to a single administrative unit all activities pertaining to a single major function. The second vests control over a given administrative unit in the hands of a single individual rather than in a board or commission. The Army of Jackson's day exhibited concentration of function in both of these senses. Jackson came to the Presidency, therefore, thoroughly familiar with the concept, as his administration reveals.

In recommending a reorganization of the Office of the Attorney General, Jackson declared himself dissatisfied with the manner in which the collection of monies owed the government was being handled. This task was performed by the accounting officer of the Treasury; Jackson suggested that sound administrative practice indicated that all legal functions be vested in the Attorney General. The Treasury official, Jackson observed, was not selected with a view to his legal knowledge. It would be far better if all such functions were vested in the federal government's legal officer, the Attorney General.<sup>5</sup>

A bill embodying this proposal was introduced into the Senate but was defeated because one of its provisions contemplated the transfer of the Patent Office from the Department of State to the Attorney General's Office. A successful measure vested authority over such

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Jackson, *Correspondence*, 6 vols., John Spencer Bassett, ed. (Carnegie Institution, 1926-31), Jackson to Secretary Monroe, Nov. 21, 1814, II, 104.

<sup>2</sup> To Monroe, Mar. 4, 1817, *ibid.*, 282.

<sup>3</sup> To Monroe, Dec. 20, 1817, *ibid.*, 343.

<sup>4</sup> To Monroe, Sept. 2, 1817, *ibid.*, 324.

<sup>5</sup> First annual message, in James D. Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, (Government Printing Office, 1896), III, 1016-17.

matters in a Treasury official to be known as the solicitor of the Treasury. This innovation failed to meet with Jackson's approval, although he did not veto the bill. The new officer might be of some service, he acknowledged, but the provisions of the statute did not ". . . supersede the necessity of extending the duties and powers of the Attorney-General." He was still convinced ". . . that the public interest would be greatly promoted by giving to that officer the general superintendence of the various law agents of the Government, and of all the law proceedings, whether civil or criminal, in which the United States may be interested. . . ."<sup>6</sup>

At the time of Jackson's inauguration, Navy morale was at a record low. Control over naval administration had gradually slipped from the Secretary to the Board of Naval Commissioners. The board exercised administrative control; it also wielded great influence in assignments and promotions. A brief examination of the situation indicated the source of difficulty and Jackson promptly proposed a radically different scheme of departmental organization.

Great improvement in the Navy Department would be effected, Jackson declared,

. . . by dispensing altogether with the Navy Board as now constituted, and substituting in its stead bureaus similar to those already existing in the War Department. Each member of the Board, transferred to the head of a separate bureau charged with specific duties, would feel in its highest degree that wholesome responsibility which can not be divided without a far more than proportionate diminution of its force. Their valuable services would become still more so when separately appropriated to distinct portions of the great interests of the Navy. . . . Under such an arrangement every branch of this important service would assume a more simple and precise character, its efficiency would be increased, and scrupulous economy in the expenditure of public money promoted.<sup>7</sup>

Jackson's argument in behalf of his proposal for reorganizing the Navy Department indicates that he was an advocate of the policy of having a single individual as head of an administrative unit. Accustomed to "one-man" administration, Jackson's dislike for boards

led him to seek a reduction in the number of individuals vested with authority, even where faced with a necessity for a multi-headed unit. In the case of the French spoliation claims, for example, he requested that the proposed five-man commission be changed to a three-man group, arguing that "three men will dispatch business more expeditiously than five, and with as much justice."<sup>8</sup>

*State vs. Federal Administration.* Given Jackson's "Jeffersonianism," it was only natural that he should favor state as against federal administration. Jackson was convinced that the states were more efficient administrative units than was the federal government. The state governments were closer to the people; consequently, their operations could be more easily scrutinized:

All will admit that the simplicity and economy of the State governments mainly depend on the fact that money has to be supplied to support them by the same men, or their agents, who vote it away in appropriations. . . . By the watchful eye of self-interest the agents of the people in the State governments are repressed and kept within the limits of a just economy.<sup>9</sup>

The states were far "more simple and economical political machines"<sup>10</sup> than the federal government. Furthermore, a serious threat to the federal system itself would arise if broad administrative powers were granted the federal government or if the federal government were authorized to pay the states for the performance of administrative functions:

Money is power, and in that Government which pays all the public officers of the States will all political power be substantially concentrated. The State governments, if governments they might be called, would lose all their independence and dignity; the economy which now distinguished them would be converted into a profusion, limited only by the extent of the supply.<sup>11</sup>

Should such payments be instituted, he warned, "the States would gradually lose their purity as well as their independence; they would not dare to murmur at the proceedings

<sup>6</sup> Memo, April 10, 1830, *Correspondence*, IV, 133.

<sup>7</sup> Eighth annual message, Richardson, *op. cit.*, III, 1463.

<sup>10</sup> Fourth annual message, *ibid.*, 1165-66.

<sup>11</sup> Veto message, Dec. 4, 1833, *ibid.*, 1286.

<sup>6</sup> Second annual message, *ibid.*, 1090.

<sup>7</sup> First annual message, *ibid.*, 1023.

of the General Government lest they should lose their supplies. . . ."<sup>12</sup>

*Concepts of Administrative Control*

**P**RESIDENTIAL *Control over Administration.* "The decisive battle over the President's administrative powers," it has been said, "was fought in the Jackson era." The issue was Jackson's removal of William Duane, Secretary of the Treasury, who had refused to carry out an order to withdraw federal funds from the Second Bank of the United States. Apparently outraged by the removal, the Senate resolved that the President had ". . . assumed upon himself authority and power not conferred by the Constitution and the laws, but in derogation of both."<sup>13</sup> Correctly interpreting this as a deliberate challenge, Jackson promptly issued a closely reasoned defense of the removal.

The "executive power," he observed, "is vested exclusively in the President." It followed that the President has the ". . . right to employ agents of his own choice [to aid him] in the performance of his duties, and to discharge them when he is no longer willing to be responsible for their acts." The presidential power of appointment and removal was ". . . left unchecked by the Constitution in relation to all executive officers, for whose conduct the President is responsible. . . ."<sup>14</sup> Having decided that the money should be transferred to a more secure repository, it was the President's patent duty to dismiss Duane when the Secretary refused to obey the order for the removal of the funds and to replace him with someone who would obey orders. If the Senate was dissatisfied with the manner in which he administered the government, he added angrily, the process of impeachment was always open.

Explicit as were Jackson's statements of presidential authority, even more light is cast upon his thinking by an examination of his administrative practices. Jackson not only professed the theory of presidential control but he carried it into action, carefully scrutinizing

the conduct of departmental business and exercising a strict supervision over his subordinates. His manner of operation, however, revealed his greatest weakness as an administrator—his inability to delegate authority or to protect himself against inundation by the minutiae of administration.

His failure to delegate authority was a direct violation of a principle of line administration of which he must have been aware in the Army—the principle that administrative decisions are to be made at the lowest possible competent level. Instead, he undertook single-handedly to supervise all of federal administration. An amazing mass of problems, ranging from the disciplining of minor clerks to the location of a privy, were personally handled by the President. The fact that he was able to pass upon so great a volume of business was more a tribute to his perseverance and industry than to his administrative ability.

*The Concept of Responsibility.* Administrative responsibility ordinarily refers to the accountability of the administrator for his actions. Jackson, however, employed the term in two senses. It meant accountability or, found in another context, it referred to the obligation of an administrator to undertake an act called for by the administrative situation and willingly to bear the consequences that might follow from the act. Using the term in this second sense, Jackson once heatedly informed Monroe that

. . . assumption of responsibility will never be shrunk from, when the public interest can thereby be promoted. I have passed through difficulties and exposures for the honor and benefit of my country, and whenever still, for this purpose, it shall become necessary to assume a further liability, no scruple will be urged or felt.<sup>15</sup>

Many years later he voiced much the same sentiment: "It would ill become the executive branch of the government to shrink from any duty which the law imposes upon it, to fix upon others the responsibility which justly belongs to itself."<sup>16</sup> In this connotation, responsibility refers to the moral obligation of the administrator to act, rather than to his accountability for a given action.

<sup>12</sup> Eighth annual message, *ibid.*, 1463.

<sup>13</sup> Senate Resolution of March 28, 1834, 10 *Congressional Debates*, part 1.

<sup>14</sup> Protest to the Senate, April 15, 1834, Richardson, *op. cit.*, 1298-99.

<sup>15</sup> Aug. 19, 1818, *Correspondence*, II, 389.

<sup>16</sup> Paper read to the Cabinet, Sept. 18, 1833, Richardson, *op. cit.*, III, 1229.

But Jackson also employed the term in its more usual sense. In the aforementioned dispute with the War Department, one of his chief objections to the violation of the chain of command was based on the argument that the commanding officer, although accountable for the actions of his subordinates, would actually have no control over them. "Every military order," he remonstrated,

must pass through the regular channel, the responsible Officer is then enabled to calculate his strength, and means, make all the necessary regulations, for the safety and security of his command and be prepared at all points. If he fails in duty or preparation for defence and a failure ensues, his head ought to pay the forfeit. Justice cries aloud against making him responsible, when another department assumes the right, at pleasure, and his own caprice, to deprive him of the means without his knowledge or consent. . . .<sup>17</sup>

Another controversy elicited a further elaboration of his views. The occasion was the celebrated invasion of Florida. Jackson claimed that his instructions ordering him to terminate the conflict then raging near Florida gave him complete discretion as to the means to be employed toward that end, and it was Jackson's contention that his instructions fully justified the invasion. The charge made against him, he pointed out, was that ". . . *I transcended the limits of my orders, and that I acted on my own responsibility.*"<sup>18</sup> But, he continued:

This principle is held to be incontrovertible—that an order, generally, to perform a certain service, or effect a certain object, without any specification of the means to be adopted, or the limits to govern the executive officer—leaves an *entire discretion* with the officer, as to the choice and application of means, but preserves the responsibility, for his acts, in the authority from which the order emanated. Under such an order, *all the acts* of the inferior are the acts of the Superior—and in no way, can the subordinate officer be impeached for his measures, except on the score of deficiency in judgment and skill.<sup>19</sup>

By the wording of the orders, "the fullest discretion was left with me in the selection and application of means to effect the specified,

legitimate objects of the Campaign; and for the exercise of a sound discretion, on principles of policy, am I alone responsible." How then, Jackson asked, could it be said that ". . . *I have transcended the limits of my orders or acted on my own responsibility?*"<sup>20</sup>

The great burden of responsibility, then, rested with the individual issuing the order. Should the objective not be clearly stated, or should the means to be employed be left to the discretion of the inferior, the responsibility for any miscarriage rested squarely upon the superior. The superior was accountable for the effectuation of a policy from its inception to its completion, except where instructions had been deliberately disobeyed. It was the obligation of all superiors ". . . not only to give orders, but to know that there [sic] orders are carried into effect."<sup>21</sup>

The superior himself was accountable for the mistakes of his assistants. In one case, for example, a supervisor had been charged with carelessness in his work. Although investigation revealed that the errors in question had been committed by a subordinate, Jackson warned the supervisor that "it is the duty of the superior to see that all acts of his subordinates is correct before he attest to it by his signature, & although this act is excusable, the head being absent, the head of Bureau will be held responsible for the like error hereafter."<sup>22</sup>

Here is at least a partial explanation of Jackson's strict control over federal administration. Presidential responsibility was qualitatively no different from that of any other federal superior. It was the duty of the Chief Executive to exercise as close a supervision over his subordinates as that which he demanded they exercise over theirs. Jackson obviously failed to realize that by delegating authority to the Secretaries and then holding them responsible for the conduct of business within their departments, the accountability which he sought could have been much more readily attained.

*The Limits of Administrative Discretion.* Discretion ordinarily refers to the adminis-

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

<sup>18</sup> To Hugh L. White, Feb. 7, 1827, *ibid.*, III, 340.

<sup>19</sup> Endorsement on back of letter to Woodbury from McClintock Young, Jan. 14, 1835, *Letters to the President*, Treasury Division, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

<sup>17</sup> To Monroe, Mar. 4, 1817, *Correspondence*, II, 282.

<sup>18</sup> To Monroe, Aug. 19, 1818, *ibid.*, 389.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

trator's latitude of choice as to the methods by which a legislatively determined objective may be achieved, that is, *how* the statute is to be enforced. Jackson's use of the word reveals, however, that he conceived of the term in another sense as well—that of the freedom of the administrator to decide *whether* he would enforce, i. e., administer, a particular law. But whichever meaning he intended, Jackson invariably applied the same rule: administrative discretion was to be held to a minimum.

Once there had been a declaration of legislative will, said Jackson, the administrator, whatever his personal feelings, had no alternative but to apply the act. This obligation was binding upon the Chief Executive as it was upon the lowest clerk. "The laws of the United States," Jackson insisted, "must be executed. I have no discretionary power on the subject; my duty is emphatically pronounced in the Constitution."<sup>23</sup>

The same rule was to be observed in the enforcement of a statute. The administrator was not to deviate from the specific provisions of the law. Even discretion to correct obvious inequities was forbidden:

We have important duties to perform in which the public is concerned, and we must lay all private partialities and friendships aside to fulfill those duties with strict justice and agreeable to those established laws and rules by which we must be governed. If injustice is done to any who may have equitable claims, and not within the rules of law and regulations, they must apply to Congress who has the power to redress their grievances. *We must adhere to the law.*<sup>24</sup>

Nor did the existence of an emergency warrant the assumption of power not expressly granted or its exercise in a manner not clearly permitted. Even during the nullification crisis Jackson denied a right to adopt emergency measures not plainly authorized by law. The Union would be preserved, he said, ". . . but by proper means. . . . We must act as the instruments of the law. . . ." <sup>25</sup>

The wise administrator would deny himself all but indispensable discretionary powers. Even the President should be ". . . ever anx-

ious to avoid the exercise of any discretionary authority which can be regulated by Congress."<sup>26</sup> As a further safeguard, Congress itself should limit as narrowly as possible the area of administrative discretion. In particular, this rule was to be observed where public funds were concerned:

I need only add to what I have on former occasions said on this subject generally that in the regulations which Congress may prescribe respecting the custody of the public moneys it is desirable that as little discretion as may be deemed consistent with their safekeeping should be given to the executive agents.<sup>27</sup>

Here especially, Jackson said, Congress should set forth in explicit detail the course to be pursued by the administrator.

#### *Departmental Management*

**T**HE *Role of the Cabinet*. One of the most striking developments of Jackson's presidency was the modification of the role of the Cabinet and of the several Secretaries. To date, those who have dealt with the subject have generally failed either to describe correctly or to account for the actual relationship between Jackson and his Cabinet. They have, moreover, neglected to note that the diminished political importance of the Cabinet had significant administrative repercussions.

The traditional judgment was nicely stated by Professor Sumner:

Jackson introduced two innovations [with regard to the Cabinet]. He put the Secretaries back more nearly into the place in which they belong by the original theory of the law. He made them executive clerks or staff officers. . . . Jackson's second innovation was that he did not hold cabinet councils.<sup>28</sup>

This statement contains two errors. The first is factual—Jackson did hold Cabinet councils. If anything, he held too many. The second and more serious mistakes lies in the implication that these "innovations" were deliberately introduced. On the contrary, Jackson had hoped to raise the prestige of the Cabinet, and no one was more chagrined than he by the actual turn of events.

<sup>23</sup> Seventh annual message, Richardson, *op. cit.*, III, 1387.

<sup>24</sup> Proclamation, Richardson, *op. cit.*, III, 1217.  
<sup>25</sup> To Amos Kendall, July 19, 1835, *Correspondence*, V, 366.

<sup>26</sup> To Poinsett, Dec. 2, 1832, *ibid.*, IV, 494.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 1386; also sixth annual message, *ibid.*, 1336.

<sup>28</sup> William G. Sumner, *Andrew Jackson* (Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1900), p. 181.

Shortly before assuming the Presidency, Jackson stated that he planned to have a "genuine old fashioned Cabinet to act together and form a counsel consultative."<sup>29</sup> The Adams administration had vividly illustrated the evils resulting from the lack of an able and harmonious group of counselors; furthermore, Jackson's failing health made the existence of such a staff a virtual necessity. Why, then, did the Jacksonian Cabinets fall so far short of the goal? The answer to this question serves also to account in large part for the altered position of the Secretaries.

The explanation is to be found in Jackson's mistaken attempt to conciliate the two leading candidates for the "succession," Calhoun and Van Buren, by a "judicious" allocation of Cabinet posts. The strategem failed sadly of its purpose. Instead of pacifying the rival factions, Jackson merely supplied them with a convenient battleground. Within less than a year, the Cabinet was hopelessly split. The Secretary of War and certain of his colleagues were not on speaking terms, and Cabinet business came to a standstill. When this deadlock was finally broken by the resignation of the entire group, Jackson had no better luck with the new Cabinet. The Secretaries were soon once more in complete disagreement, this time over the question of the Bank. Jackson was again reduced to the necessity of depending for political advice upon the Kitchen Cabinet and the few department heads who supported his policies. Actually, not until the last years of his administration was Jackson able to recruit a group of individuals who wholeheartedly supported his policies. By then the damage had been done—Jackson had become accustomed to look elsewhere for political advice.

*The Role of the Secretary.* Divested of political influence, the Secretaries became subordinate officers carrying out policies which they had little voice in deciding. While it is doubtful if Jackson would have been inclined to grant his subordinates a wide area of administrative freedom even under the best of circumstances, the fact that the Secretaries did not have his political confidence further influenced this development, for Jackson's opin-

ion of a person was in considerable measure determined by the vigor with which that individual supported his policies. It was not purely coincidental that the two Secretaries who were permitted the greatest administrative freedom, Van Buren and Kendall, were also the men whose political judgment he most trusted.

Though nominally responsible to the President only for the general performance of their duties, the Secretaries were little more than the instruments by which he controlled the affairs of the various governmental agencies. As Jackson once bluntly told a recalcitrant Secretary, he regarded a department head as ". . . merely an executive agent, a subordinate, and you may say so in self-defense."<sup>30</sup> Proceeding on this premise, Jackson declared that in conducting the business of the government, it would be his "province to give his secretaries the rule and their's to acquiesce."<sup>31</sup>

There is an obvious similarity between the role of the Secretaries and that of military subordinates. Administratively, the Secretaries became little more than glorified clerical assistants, charged with the execution of presidential commands. Blair aptly described the relationship when he commented that "Old Hickory . . . is to his cabinet here what he was to his aids [in the Army]."<sup>32</sup>

#### *The Temper of Jacksonian Administration.*

THE events of Jackson's military career justify in large measure the verdict of those who contended that he was a rash and tactless administrator, interested only in the attainment of his objectives and capable of attaining them only by the most direct methods. However, a full decade elapsed between his military career and his civil administration; as President, Jackson reveals qualities almost entirely lacking in the earlier period. On the other hand, many of the unfortunate characteristics of the earlier period are noticeably absent. As President, Jackson proved to be a shrewd, cautious, and at times surprisingly tactful administrator. He had apparently

<sup>29</sup> James Parton, *Andrew Jackson*, 3 vols. (Mason Brothers, 1906), III, 530.

<sup>31</sup> XL *Niles Register* 169.

<sup>32</sup> Marquis James, *Andrew Jackson* (Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1938), p. 580.

<sup>29</sup> Memorandum of Dec. 28, 1828, *Correspondence*, III, 451-52.

come to realize that successful administration required diplomacy as well as energy. Unfortunately, his real abilities have been obscured by the legend which attributed to him only the ability for forthright and arbitrary action. Very few individuals realized that he had developed into an administrator who could be, when required, both discreet and adroit. In evidence of this, a number of cases illustrating the different types of administrative problems he faced and the manner in which he met them will be presented. They indicate that Jackson possessed hitherto unsuspected administrative talents.

Among the most difficult problems he had to handle were those involving top federal officials, for at the higher administrative levels the selection of personnel often becomes a political as well as an administrative matter, and a hasty act may have immediate political repercussions. At the very outset of Jackson's administration, Postmaster-General McLean indicated that he would not support the policy of removing from office those employees who had taken an active part in the campaign of 1828. This raised a serious problem, for McLean was a prominent politician. He could not be dismissed without risking immediate and unfavorable political reaction. Where *General* Jackson would have summarily discharged McLean, *President* Jackson solved the dilemma by promoting him to the Supreme Court and appointing a more complaisant individual to the postmastership. Other personnel matters were handled with equal adroitness. Edward Livingston and Littleton W. Tazewell, named as envoys to England and France, were eased out of office so smoothly that they left under the impression that their going was voluntary. In another case, when it became necessary to recall a politically influential minister from Mexico, Jackson urged Van Buren to do it in "such a way as will preserve his feelings."<sup>33</sup>

The dismissal of a sizable number of employees stirred up additional difficulties. Despite his sweeping victory in 1828, Jackson faced a hostile Senate, and he realized that the upper house would do its best to hamper

his policy of "reform." He therefore delayed the submission of nominations, sending in only the names of individuals reappointed or of those chosen to fill posts vacated by the operation of the Tenure of Office Act of 1820. Not until January, 1830, did Jackson forward the names of individuals appointed to replace those who had been discharged. So astutely did he conduct the nominations that only 6 of the 319 nominees were rejected.

The same ability to proceed cautiously was demonstrated in the administration of foreign affairs. Here, if anywhere, imprudence would have been disastrous, as both the Texan War for Independence and the dispute with France over the payment of indemnities occurred during Jackson's presidency. In the case of Texas, he adhered tenaciously to a policy of strict neutrality, despite the attempts of both governments to force his hand. He was equally circumspect in his handling of the indemnity issue. Jackson did his best to find a peaceful solution to the quarrel and the actual break of diplomatic relations did not come until he had exhausted all honorable alternatives. By then, he was so clearly correct in his stand that even John Quincy Adams came to his support.

Any doubt of Jackson's ability and desire to implement a policy with a minimum of friction should be dispelled by the masterful manner in which he handled the nullification crisis. As early as 1830 Jackson had decided that nullification or secession was incompatible with the continued existence of the Union and that any step in that direction was to be resolutely opposed. The great problem, of course, was to pursue this policy without goading the South into open rebellion or without moving so timidly as to encourage the nullifiers.

Jackson proved himself fully able to cope with the situation, skillfully avoiding the perils which lay on either side. The War and Navy departments were secretly alerted; the entire garrison at Charleston was quietly transferred out and replaced with more trustworthy troops; the collector of the port was cautioned to be ready to counteract any measure which might be adopted to prevent the collection of duties; and a secret agent was dispatched to investigate the possibility that

<sup>33</sup> Jackson to Van Buren, Aug. 28, 1829, *Van Buren Papers*, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D. C., vol. 9.

federal officers at Charleston had been won over by the secessionists. At the same time, Jackson, who had been in constant touch with the Union party, promised to do all within his power to aid them in the event of actual hostilities.

Only after months of careful preparation did Jackson issue his famous Nullification Proclamation. It read, said Parton, "like the last appeal of a sorrowing but resolute father to wayward, misguided sons. Argument, warning, and entreaty were blended in its composition." Having warned South Carolina that he intended to enforce the laws, Jackson ordered the War Department to be ready for action. The promise of support to the Unionists was repeated, although Jackson said that he personally believed that the nullifiers "would return to their obedience" once they realized that he was in earnest.<sup>34</sup> Moving openly now, Jackson requested that Congress authorize him to deal with the intransigents in South Carolina. General Scott was ordered to take command of the federal forces in that state but was given secret instructions that it was Jackson's desire that he act "with as much discretion and moderation as possible."<sup>35</sup> The nullifiers, Jackson said, ". . . have placed themselves thus far in the wrong. They must be kept there."<sup>36</sup>

The Compromise of 1833 ended any need for further action, but Jackson is entitled to a good share of credit for that compromise. As a result of his capacity for quiet but thorough preparation the federal government was in a complete state of readiness. He had been circumspect enough to deprive the nullifiers of any excuse for precipitate action but, at the same time, his policy had been so resolute that they were fully aware that he intended to see the matter through. That realization, in view of Jackson's reputation, was more than enough to make them ponder the hazards of their course and to seize upon any compromise that would permit them to claim even a moral victory.

The second basic misconception with regard

<sup>34</sup> To Poinsett, Jan. 16, 1833, *Correspondence*, V, 5.

<sup>35</sup> W. L. G. Smith, *Lewis Cass* (Derby and Jackson, 1856), p. 271.

<sup>36</sup> To Poinsett, Feb. 7, 1833, *Correspondence*, V, 14-15.

to Jacksonian administration has already been mentioned—the tradition that he was careless of the means by which he attained his ends. Enough evidence has already been presented to cast doubt upon the accuracy of Schurz's statement that Jackson ". . . never understood that, if constitutional government is to be preserved, the legality of the means used must be looked upon as no less important than the rightfulness of the ends pursued."<sup>37</sup> Jackson insisted that any administrative act have explicit legislative or constitutional sanction, and also that the area of administrative discretion be curtailed as sharply as possible. No one would have more severely condemned the type of administration described by Sumner than Jackson himself.

Jackson's civil administration, then, reveals attributes quite different from those which marked his military administration. He demonstrated an awareness that diplomacy and tact were indispensable administrative assets and he evidenced an unmistakable willingness to go out of his way to avoid arousing opposition that might have imperiled the achievement of his ends. Moreover, he was as fully concerned with the legality of the means as he was with the desirability of the objective.

As his abilities as a politician have been overlooked in portraying Jackson as a blunt and forthright soldier, so have his talents as an administrator been almost wholly neglected. Probably because of the relationship between his presidency and the spoils system, he has been traditionally regarded as a poor administrator. This interpretation is not accurate. Jackson was vitally interested in administrative economy and efficiency, and during his tenure of office much was accomplished toward these ends. Those closest to him—Van Buren, Kendall, and Benton—were unanimous in their commendation of his administrative abilities. Finally, and most important, even his political enemies always on the alert for some means to discredit him, were totally unable to substantiate their charges that the executive department was being poorly administered. This was the most impressive praise that Jackson could have received.

<sup>37</sup> Carl Schurz, *Henry Clay*, 2 vols. (Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1899), II, 107-08.