

REFORMING ADMINISTRATION*

The basic responsibility of administration is continuity. Continuity is a long-term concept and the ways and means of dealing with long-term problems are not the same as the short-term. But in our day-to-day work we are concerned with matters of the moment. This cleavage is getting worse as the size of our problems if progressively increasing.

It is only through training that it is possible to ensure a steady flow of properly qualified human beings in the administrative pipeline. Because we are living in an age of shrinking time and space and quick technological advancement our previous experience (learnt the hard way) is not relevant to the issues at hand. Most of the academic knowledge we picked up in the University years ago is also out of date. Personal obsolescence is something like creeping inflation – strenuous efforts have to be made to nullify their deleterious effects. This calls for fresh ideas which can only be an outcrop of an open mind.

Considering the present day state of knowledge the single most common denominator is “information”. Let us learn to handle it as a commodity we will then start in the right direction.

WE APPEAR to be moving through a critical phase in our existence and several changes can be expected by the time we are ready for the coming elections. One of the greatest weaknesses in Public Administration has been the excessive secretiveness of government officials and government operations. The barriers of secrecy and “hush-hush” around administrative activity need to be broken. Secrecy in vital matters, such as national security, international diplomacy, preventive action and budgetary proposals may be imperative and naturally, understandable. So many documents are unnecessarily classified as “Secret”, “Confidential”, “For Official Use Only”, all this needs a thorough revisions so as to make the best use of such material by the public, scholars and others for research, study and information. Just as hoarded wealth does positive harm. Just as circulation of wealth improves our economy. In a like fashion sitting on information does positive harm. This trait has been inherited from our former colonial rulers. One of the reasons of our being in the mess that we are in is precisely due to this penchant for secrecy.

Puppets

At the outset it is worth repeating that there are far too few amongst our politicians, who realize the impact of good or bad administration on the country. Little wonder that they have been puppets in the past. Efficiency many times is defined as the sudden accomplishment of a particular job. Personal expedition, special treatment out of the ordinary action, or just simply pushing a file quickly from office to office in an effort to arrive at results is confused with efficiency. If we give ourselves time to ponder we must inexorably come to the conclusion that a system based on privilege (such as ours is)

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creates chaos leading to more and more “ad hoc” action. This leads to more and more chaos!

Let us be brutally frank and admit that we have failed administratively to create a system which is meaningful. It is easy to blame conditions, to blame others, to blame the weather... At one time the human being pulled the plough, then the bullock did, then the tractor took over nay a supercharged tractor. We are now attempting to hitch our plough to a jet aeroplane. Unfortunately there is just no common ground! We must understand that the mere fact that the size of the effort/problem has increased to such an extent that traditional models refuse to deliver the goods.

Of course, human tendency is to incorporate the latest tools into an existing vehicle without realizing a time arrives when the basic vehicle itself must be modified if continued improvements have to be made.

In 1937/38 the Revenue earnings of the Government of India (Central) were Rs. 86 crores (Sea Customs accounted for Rs. 43 crores). At partition in Pakistan in 1947/48 Income-tax receipts were Rs. 3 crores, Sea Customs Rs. 11 crores, Excise 1.3 crores, Sales Tax Rs. 4.0 crores, yielding a grand total of less than Rs. 20 crores. To-day Income-tax receipts are Rs. 85 crores, Customs Rs. 170 crores, Excise Rs. 207 crores, Sales Tax Rs. 67 crores. Only diehards in the Col. Blimp fashion will insist an organization meant to cater to the objectives of a ruler nation with a turnover (Central government) at Partition of around Rs. 20 crores is adequate today when we are an independent country with a turnover more than 25 times as much i.e. Rs. 529 crores! (Our provincial revenues are now placed at Rs. 218 crores), To put it in other words: the set-up for a very small turnover is just no good for the set-up required for a huge turnover. The modus operandi is different. The vehicle itself has to be altered for efficient management. Only those who wish to bury their heads in the sand can say continuous patching up of our administrative system will do the trick. Nothing of the sort. Our administrative inheritance is rotten. Attempts of resuscitating outmoded and antediluvian ways will lead us to the brink once more. The responsibility for this must be shouldered by the institution (the common factor in authority in all administrations since 1947) called the CSP. As a columnist (no relative) in his Handicap Race (P.T. 31.8.1969) puts it so well. That we have a personnel system like “a handicap race in which no participant will be allowed to overtake the man (CSP) running in front”. Such a position arises when the starter, the referee, the umpire and patron belong to the same institution. This is why so many discerning observers of the “race” have asserted that the CSP is a self-perpetuating and self-regulating mechanism: that it is a system of the CSP, by the CSP, for the CSP – a most perfect democracy! The CSP has deliberately set out to defend, retain and impose – by all the means at their command – an ancient structure of service by ensuring perpetuation of the “status quo”.

The difference between a developing and “under-developing” country is that in the former they are continuously adapting to change. This implies countries such as the USA and Japan are yet developing. Let us understand that we have to make decisions with a speed and decisiveness unheard and undreamt of two decades ago. Because the size of

the effort (hence complexity) is increasing an increasing number of decisions have to be made. And all the while we feel we require more time and the coordination of an increasing variety of skills to arrive at results. It is, therefore, puerile to presume that the system which has lead us to the pretty pass we are in is “super” or “tops” or “adequate” or “just fine”! If we wish to understand the nature of our problems – after all inefficiency is the result and not cause – it is impossible if those concerned do not want anything new to be done, are convinced that little new can be done, and know all the arguments and moves which will prevent anything new from being done.

Time and again we are told that the experience of other countries is invalid and in the same breath foreign authorities are trotted out, such as: Khera, Asoka Chanda, Gorewala, Appleby, Garble, Parks, Fairchild, Tinker....The last named was a former member of the I.C.S. and has said of that service that it is “a soaring pyramid possessing a refinement of the Hindu caste and British class systems”!

Absurdities

To talk of “absurdities near home” by two talented Pakistanis – Munir and Cornelius – is truly an insult to commonsense. “It is a tribute to Cornelius’ acumen that what he said was proved some 6 years later by Fulton in England”. I am sure Fulton et al must have found a tremendous amount in the Cornelius Pay and Service Commission Report which must have assisted them in their labours. One has to read the two reports to understand this.

It is clear that our existing model of district administration is an inheritance born of the necessity for our erstwhile colonial rulers to keep the Empire secure. On account of the then slow and tardy means of movement (horseback), the only way that Whitehall had was to ensure a representative of the Crown was on the spot. This is also why we had (formerly) the British Indian, and now the Pakistani flag flying over the D.C’s residence – a vestige of our servitude.

It appears we are so moribund in our thinking that any ideas which do away with the district as the administrative unit must be suspect. There is never any harm in investigating different leads and then rejecting the findings, for then rejection will be based on knowledge rather than on ignorance. There can be no doubt that district administration is an anachronism. We must investigate ways and means of looking into our problems from the point of view of programmes be they agricultural, industrial, urban or rural in nature. The type of “co-ordination” affected by the D.C in these days is a misnomer. Personal co-operation is misunderstood and equated with co-ordination. The means for communications have improved tremendously since the days of animal transport. Effective use of such tools makes possible efficient centralized control. This means coordination can be effectively centralized provided we also understand that both centralization and decentralization are two sides of the same coin.

Present-day administrative managerial practices are proving the correctness of having to encourage innovative and rational approaches to problems. This is a lesson we should

learn from others. Particularly where problems appear to be getting more involved and complicated. The basis of several of our pet ideas have to be systematically analysed, developed and evaluated. Further, there has to be a more systematic and continuing audit of current practices to ensure that they are keeping pace with altering circumstances. "In the past questioning has been done haphazardly and usually, on account of the non-availability of facts intuition yet holds sway in decision-making. Changes must be based on a thorough assessment of alternatives that must be anchored in data – both reliable and in depth – relevant to the issues at hand and which are appropriately analysed and presented."

If we look at the fate of local self-government we must inexorably link its failure to the bureaucratic-ridden process. District administration and the so-called holy trinity of the D.C, S.P and S.J must be re-assessed. The D.C sitting in and on the deliberations of the District Council has provided the greatest proof of misuse of an otherwise sound Basic Democracy system. "Good government imposed is no substitute for real self-government".

It is clear that it is impossible for a non-professional or gifted amateur to deliver the goods. As Fulton says of the British Administrative Class – its lack of continuity in the job, its relative isolation, its lack of management skills and experience and its largely irrelevant educational background – combine to cause administrative inefficiencies. True, the traditional skills of the administrative class in running the government machine will obviously remain important, however, these new demands call for new additional skills that must remain outside the scope of even the most able generalist.

Reforming services

In the past several proposals have been made, particularly since 1953 to change the structure of government service, in keeping with the needs and aspirations of an independent nation. All such proposals have, however, been studiously suppressed by the inheritors of the old ICS mantle, with this difference that the white man's burden is now being carried by the brown! No independent country can progress when such a premium is placed on secrecy.

All efforts to introduce revolutionary policies and changes in the socio-economic and political spheres in the country will be frustrated if the present outmoded civil service and governmental organizational structures are not changed first. The recent education policy says that bureaucratic control over education must be removed. It is obvious, therefore, that until bureaucrats are in control of education the present education policy will not be implemented.

This only goes to show the necessity to introduce a changed structure if new policies have to be adopted. To do this Cornelius's conclusion that a unified civil service must be set up is a condition precedent if we wish to put administration in its proper place so as to ensure it does not get derailed once again. With its derailment the country also gets derailed!

Some writers would have us believe that the D.C. has as a part of him a number of attributions, that in addition his role is Quixotic! The COD definition of Quixotic is self-explanatory "an enthusiastic visionary, pursuer of lofty but impractical ideas, a person utterly regardless of his material interests in comparison with honour and devotion"! A list of attributions (not functions or responsibilities, mind you) smacks of the divine right of kings. Those days have gone forever. There are other ways of dealing with administrative scrofulas. Let us call a spade a spade i.e the D.C's workload bears no relation to his capacity, humanly, to discharge his accretion of duties. You can overload all with work some of the time, but cannot overload some with all of the work all of the time.

Unplanned thinking

To talk of "reluctance to be co-ordinated" by organizations such as WAPDA and ADC and the need for "special co-ordinative arrangements" betrays the type of ad hoc thinking that is meant to cater to the requirements of the moment. It is precisely such "unplanned" thinking that has led to most of our administrative/managerial ills. What is required, is to create a formalized process or movement of information (the common flux of all organized activity). Because such a process involves more than just issuing of orders or directives and the like. Because it means that use of the scientific method and the personal inconveniences that go with it. Because we prefer ostrich-like to bury our heads in the sand. Because we come away from meetings with a feeling of smug self-satisfaction and self-accomplishment.... We, therefore, are not in a position to pull back, think coolly and see the wood for the trees. Little wonder we do not know how much of the situation we are in today is on account of policy.

From time to time we are told that any change in the status quo i.e. the basic vehicle, is unconventional. Of course it is, but only from the point of view of the establishment entrenched in positions of authority. Reference to Cornelius, Gladioux, Egger, Beckett and Fulton's Reports have all said in one way or another: that pay and promotion should be linked with merit. That the generalist needs specialisation and the specialist generalization. That a broadly-based administrative structure is required. That there should be uniform pattern of pay scales. That there should be several tiers in the service hierarchy (Cornelius recommended 7). That the Section Officers jobs should be abolished. That administrators should not float around from department to department. That a new public service commission should be set up. That there should be interchange of personnel laterally inter-organisationally. That training should be emphasized.... All these are thrice-told tales and are obviously commonsense (unconventional?)

It would be of relevant interest to go through Hazrat Ali's letter to Malik Ashtar, about 1,300 years ago, the then Governor of Egypt. Application of the principles of management/administration as enunciated therein would do us a tremendous measure of good. I see no reason to ignore our indigenous fund of knowledge.

We should try to understand that administration is becoming increasingly scientific. Many a time we are told administration is an art, well so is ship building using the same reasoning. But what has happened in ship-building over the last 60 years is that the

factors involved have been systematized (codified) in such a way so as to enable transferring the skills involved as a whole from one to another. "Instead of passing on information from generation to generation, and from one craftsman to another, by a process of imitated action and by a mystique of unexplained hints and wrinkles, science distils all the wisdom into something more pithy" (Stafford Beer). Do we know of any individual with a degree/diploma in ship-building who is not a beginner at the end of his course of instruction? But we must agree he has a flying start over the untutored. The sooner we get down to systematisation and codification in administration/management the better.

I quote from none other than our President, who recently said at the annual dinner of the Karachi High Court Bar Association (P.T., 31.8.1969): "At the time when the Armed Forces were compelled to assume responsibility for running the government of the country the law and order situation was extremely alarming. The normal law-enforcing agencies had become entirely ineffective. The economic life stood paralysed. There were mounting complaints from a groaning people of inefficiency, corruption, nepotism and the like evils against the administration. In the circumstances, the foremost task before my government has been to bring order out of chaos protect life... liberty and property of the people and *rehabilitate the administration which was never at a lower ebb our history (italics mine)*.