

19. The final chapter deals with areas where the Principal officials' tasks in administrative management join his work in furthering political programmes. Economic planning is a major concern of all governments, whether they are part of the "developing world" or not. Senior personnel policy is the area in which par excellence the Principal officials' influence is felt.

20. The Ottawa meeting established that Principal officials, whatever their formal designation, have a degree of mutual understanding based on the obligation to look at organisation from both an administrative and a political point of view. The political content in their work may or may not be regarded as partisan. The scope and nature of their responsibilities involve interesting questions of judgement about the strategies which it is appropriate for full-time permanent officials to advocate. A central interest of the conference was to develop an appreciation of the judgement which Principal officials display in choosing between the options available.

II Managing the Machinery of Government

21. The first rule of the Principal official is to manage the machinery of government in the purely technical sense of ensuring that the arrangements which have been made can carry the load placed upon them. Because that load is largely an expression of political judgement, it is not always easy to separate this role from the second role of tendering advice on how the machine might be given a direction, but if the technical aspect is discussion first and separately, it makes it possible to isolate more clearly how Principal officials work.

Support for Central Decision-Making

22. The role of the Principal official has most frequently been associated with the post of Cabinet Secretary or Secretary to the Executive Head of Government. The management of the central arena of decision-making has called for the most skilled administrative advice from senior officials. The Commonwealth contains many different "support systems" at the centre of government. Their character varies according to the style of planning which is being pursued, and to the basic pattern of institutions. Principal

officials are usually faced with a recognisable set of alternatives when they are asked to give advice on the design of the most appropriate "support".

23. The conference considered some of the possible systems. "Support" might have to go beyond the necessary organisation for the routine submission of papers to the centre of government. The degree to which this might be necessary and the kind of analytic work which anything more than routine requires, were both subjects of great interest to Principal officials.

24. Cabinet office influence is traditionally associated with its general function of servicing all inter-departmental meetings of importance, whether they consist of civil servants or of ministers. The Cabinet Secretary plays an important part in advising what committees might be set up, and what items might be included on their agenda. It is also part of his general functions to ensure that appropriate decisions, once they have been taken, are properly conveyed and understood. This role on occasion cannot avoid touching questions of substance. But in general the cabinet offices of the Commonwealth are not organised in such a way as to provide a separate channel of advice to ministers, outside the routine briefings which they receive from their departments.

25. In countries where a separate Ministry of Planning has been established, there is a tendency for the planning machinery itself to develop its own "support system" separately from cabinet. There is also a tendency in all countries for the Ministry of Finance to undertake forms of inter-departmental co-ordination which might otherwise fall to the cabinet office. If there are any inter-departmental committees which do not fall under cabinet office jurisdiction, they tend to be in the financial field.

26. Where Planning Offices exist, there is also a tendency for them to be 'expansionist' and therefore to be opposed by a more 'restrictive' Ministry of Finance. Disputes between departments of finance and planning may only be settled by some arrangement under the Prime Minister or associated with a central cabinet office. In Swaziland, for example, the Ministry of Planning was taken into the Prime Minister's Department. It looks as if a planning unit is more likely to be found in those Commonwealth countries which

retain something of the strong secretariat tradition associated with pre-independence administration.

27. The conference identified two rather different kinds of support. The first arises by extension of the cabinet office into fields of planning; the second is an elaboration of the secretariat system, which is particularly likely to handle planning questions separately from cabinet work. These two styles of support are closely related, because they both rely on inter-departmental meetings. But in the secretariat tradition, the cabinet secretary is less likely to be the principal adviser to government.

28. The basic tool of "support" in the secretariat tradition is the Conference of Secretaries. This has perhaps been most fully developed in India and Sri Lanka. The Heads of Departments in India meet together regularly to cover such broad policy areas as internal affairs and economic questions. The cabinet secretary may also call together special *ad hoc* meetings to thrash out particular problems. But the cabinet secretary has no total authority in this matter. Other Permanent Secretaries may also summon their colleagues to special meetings, or set up committees within a general framework of the conference of secretaries. The Sri Lanka Conference of Secretaries illustrates how the post of cabinet secretary can be transformed within the secretariat tradition. The Permanent Secretaries Conference used to be summoned and presided over by the Secretary to the Treasury, and its meetings were held at the Ministry of Finance. The Secretary of the Conference was an assistant secretary to the Ministry of Finance. But in 1970 the Cabinet of the present government decided to create the post of a Director of Cabinet Affairs, who is also secretary to the cabinet. This transferred the servicing of inter-departmental committees under the general umbrella of the Conference of Secretaries from the Ministry of Finance to the Cabinet Office. Meetings were henceforward held at the Cabinet Office, and the Director of Cabinet Affairs began to act as the prime link between the Cabinet and the conference.

29. These two traditions of management in the central arena therefore formulate rather differently the questions which might be asked about the development of support for the central decision-making process. Where Cabinet Offices have established their pre-eminence, and where planning has not been made the subject of a

separate institutional responsibility, there are suggestions that the cabinet office itself might develop a separate capacity to offer advice to ministers collectively. Elsewhere, in countries which have at the same time retained a strong central secretariat and established a separate planning department, the technical questions for improving the quality of decision-making tend to be framed in terms of improving the office of the President, the Prime Minister, or the Chief Secretary, rather than in terms of the Cabinet Secretariat.

30. The Ottawa meeting showed a strong interest in the 1968 reforms of the Canadian Privy Council Office. These seemed to represent a clear range of options in developing the role of the Cabinet Secretariat.

31. Canadian officials saw recent developments in terms of three levels of complexity. They postulated that Cabinet Offices elsewhere would be obliged to move from the second to the third stage, as Canada had done. At the first level, the administrator in the Cabinet Office is required to do no more than organise and circulate the appropriate papers; but at the second level, the staff is expected to ensure that Ministers have sufficient information to feel satisfied that they have considered all the possible options. At the third level, in addition to this responsibility for information, the Cabinet Office is concerned with providing a system of long-term planning and of monitoring policy implementation. A central part of this third stage is that the Cabinet Secretary is expected to supply some kind of overall analysis. The Canadian Government associated this transition to the third stage with the development of more elaborate techniques in planning the use of resources. In Canada, the Treasury Board is part of the Privy Council Office.

32. The meeting considered the Canadian and British experiments in this field. The Canadian reforms of 1968 included setting a time for each of the Standing Committees of Cabinet to meet on a regular basis. They also removed as many questions as possible from the over-burdened meeting of the full Cabinet. Ministers were issued with agendas and documents, whether they were members of a committee or not; and decisions taken in committee were not implemented until after they had been included in an annex to the main cabinet agenda, from which any Minister could give notice that he wished to have a particular decision reopened.

The Cabinet is divided into Standing Committees to deal with specific policy areas, and coordinating committees, of which the priorities and planning committee has received the greatest publicity. This committee is not an "inner Cabinet", but it deals with long-term questions, and the officials in the Planning Division who service it bring new expertise to the decision-making process.

33. The British equivalent is in a more experimental form. The central policy review staff under Lord Rothschild is designed to act as a unit within the Cabinet Office which can brief Ministers collectively on the overall strategy of the Government. Perhaps its most valuable function is the presentation which it makes two or three times a year to Ministers, relating what they said in their election programme to what they achieved in office. The staff are asked to monitor the performance of the administration as a whole, and to forecast future difficulties. The central policy review staff is accessible to all Ministers, and not merely a private instrument of the Prime Minister. It can be commissioned to undertake specific reviews of controversial areas of policy. Lord Rothschild himself has made several public statements about the kind of research work which his staff are able to do. But their position in the cabinet office rests on co-operation with other departments. Their function is to undertake long-term reviews, and they cannot therefore in any sense be regarded as a system of "counter-briefing" to the briefing already given to Ministers by their departments.

34. Those working within the secretariat tradition found it more difficult to identify the three levels of complexity which the Canadians had suggested. They were less inclined to see the kind of analysis being performed on policy review as part of cabinet office functions, and were accustomed to regard the complexity of the support system as a function of the office of the chief executive, served as it often was by a Chief secretary of government. The Commonwealth contains several different forms of combining the Prime Minister's Office with the Cabinet Office.*

35. Although some countries have followed Britain in retaining a very small private office for the Prime Minister, attached rather loosely to the Cabinet Office, the majority of countries have

*See Appendix P.36.

brought the Cabinet secretariat functions within the general ambit of the Chief Executive's Office, President or Prime Minister.

36. The Commonwealth therefore contains several examples of a "support system" based entirely on the Chief Executive's office and centralised in a secretariat style. The Chief Secretary of Government in Malaysia, for example, has in his office a separate Cabinet division, as well as units dealing with general planning and economic planning, which come under a junior minister within the Prime Minister's Office. The main inter-departmental committees of co-ordination are therefore not so much Cabinet committees in the strictest sense, but departmental committees of the Prime Minister's Office. These include such Ministerial committees as the National Action Council, and a meeting of heads of departments called the National Development Planning Committee. In some cases this style of support involves creating junior ministers within the office of head of the executive, who work directly to him in the business of co-ordination, and are somewhat separate in their functions from those heads of executive departments who are not included in the central planning apparatus. In Swaziland, for example, it is suggested that the heads of the four major co-ordinating ministries should be Ministers of State in the Prime Minister's Office. The Planning Council would then consist of the Prime Minister as Chairman, and the respective Ministers of State with their Permanent Secretaries, including the Secretary of the Cabinet. In this kind of arrangement, the Secretary to the Cabinet need not necessarily be the Chief Secretary of the Prime Minister's Office. Some of the difficulties of identifying the Principal official arise in administrative reforms of this kind.

37. The design of the "support system" is therefore closely connected with the designation of the post which has the recognised status of Principal official. In those countries where the conference of secretaries is not entirely under the management of the Cabinet Office, it may be difficult to identify one individual who carries the full weight of responsibility both for the design of the machinery of government and for general policy advice on its use. But a developed cabinet system or an elaborate executive office usually provides a post which is unequivocally the head of the paid career civil service.

38. The constitutional problems raised by the development of the decision-making system also reflect the mixture of administrative habits to be found in the Commonwealth. In those countries which consider moving their Cabinet secretariats into the third stage of complexity outlined by the Canadians, there seems to be a danger that Ministers will lose their traditional sense of personal responsibility for the affairs of their departments. A Cabinet Secretariat which presents the analysis of departmental policies on some sort of collective scale to a Cabinet Committee seems to be weakening departmental responsibility. But in those countries which cannot see the Cabinet Secretariat developing on these lines, with a suitable analytic capacity, this danger seems remote.

39. Similarly, those countries interested in reforming the decision-making processes of Cabinet are likely to associate them with some form of reconstruction in the Prime Minister's Office. There are a number of rather delicate problems surrounding the relationship between the Prime Minister's Office and the Cabinet. No Prime Minister could tolerate bad relationships between the two. The Secretary to the Canadian Cabinet distinguished the two sides of the work in the following terms: "The Prime Minister's Office is partisan, politically oriented, yet operationally sensitive. The Privy Council Office is non-partisan, operationally oriented, yet politically sensitive". The difficulty of relating these two parts of the centre of the machine arises largely in those countries following the British tradition. Commonwealth countries in the secretariat tradition find it easier to fit a Cabinet division into the Prime Minister's Office.

40. Finally, countries which have developed their Cabinet Office to the third stage of complexity in policy review machinery may find that they are beginning to change the relationship between Ministers and civil servants. In Canada, civil servants and Ministers sit together in Cabinet committees. But it is more common in the Commonwealth for countries to follow the British tradition of separating official and unofficial committees. On occasion, officials other than the Cabinet Secretary may attend meetings by invitation. The design of new kinds of support for the Cabinet or other central decision-making bodies may begin to affect these conventions.

41. The Principal official in recommending changes at the centre, may easily run into political questions of some importance. Much of the emphasis in the reform of Cabinet Office structure, both in Canada and Britain, has been in favour of developing a stronger sense of collective responsibility for the Government in power. The Canadian reforms of 1968 were deliberately designed to give Ministers a greater sense of participation in a collective programme. The design of the support system can never be strictly a matter of administrative efficiency alone.

Administrative Co-Ordination

42. Whatever support system is used, the day-to-day running of the machine requires the Principal official to concentrate on managing the system of internal communication inside government. The task of co-ordination requires an intimate knowledge of the machine. Traditionally, the Cabinet Secretary has been responsible for preparing the agenda for Ministers to consider, and once they have issued their decision, for conveying them to the appropriate agencies responsible for execution.

43. But many Commonwealth countries see problems of communication inside government largely in terms of development policies. Most governments are concerned with economic growth, as well as the distribution of wealth. Chapters III and IV below indicate the degree to which many of the management problems experienced at the centre of government can be related to the overall responsibility for economic development.

44. There is always a danger that the Principal official will be asked to develop his own office more than it is reasonable to expect. Some may suggest that the centre should be developed as a counter-weight to departments. Officials at the centre may often doubt whether specific options have been raised and assessed in departments before submissions are prepared. The work required to act as a check on departments may entail more expertise than a Cabinet Office can provide. Each variation in the support system described in the last chapter may develop its own method of policy review, and form of staffing at the centre. But many problems of co-ordination have common features, whatever the system.

45. Principal officials see three major types of problem. First, submissions made to the centre of government by departments may be deficient either in form or in content. It may be difficult for Ministers to secure the appropriate information from departments other than their own, if they are to participate in a proper collective decision. Some submissions appear deliberately to ignore a series of options. Secondly, there may be deficiencies of structure, which make it difficult to secure a smooth co-ordination of policies. It sometimes seems particularly difficult to relate planning departments, finance departments and other offices servicing central inter-departmental committees, such as the Cabinet Office. Development questions particularly require their own form of co-ordination. In Jamaica, for example, the planning office was brought directly under the Prime Minister's department. In countries such as Britain, where large departments have been created in order to bring together under the same Ministerial responsibility certain allied areas of policy-making, there is a new kind of difficulty. The Cabinet Office may find it hard to persuade a large department that some questions should be considered in the Cabinet arena. There is a tendency for large departments to regard their own structure as sufficient for handling the major questions.

46. Thirdly, the most important kind of problem in co-ordination is the formal disagreement between departments or agencies. This may take place as a result of lack of communication between departments, or perhaps more frequently in the disputes which take place at the lower level of the administrative hierarchy.

47. The Principal official can try and remedy some of these difficulties by informal methods. He may, for instance, act as "Devil's Advocate" in Cabinet, in order to put a case which he thinks has not been properly argued in the submission made by the department. Alternatively, he may act before a particular submission is considered, by consulting with his fellow Permanent Secretaries, or by calling special meetings. He might even speak to Ministers and ask them to arrange informal meetings themselves. It may occasionally be necessary for a difficulty which has arisen lower down the hierarchy to be brought up to the top, even to the Ministerial level.

48. But the principal formal methods of handling problems of co-ordination lie in using the network of inter-departmental committees

which come under the Cabinet Office, or belong to the Conference of Secretaries. It may be possible to create a special committee to examine papers submitted for Cabinet consideration. For example, in Botswana, the Cabinet Secretary joins the Attorney-General and the Permanent Secretary of Finance to form a Cabinet "business committee" which has the power to refer papers back to departments if they consider that they need amplification.

49. The Principal official frequently acts as the prime link between Ministers and the departments of government. The Cabinet Secretary is responsible for making sure that the decision taken is transferred to the appropriate place for action. Some decisions may need explanation, and in these cases, the Permanent official may need to have informal discussions. The Conference of Secretaries provides an excellent meeting place for such expositions. For example, the Chief Secretary to the Government in Malaysia reports Cabinet decisions to meetings of Permanent Secretaries, even though they have already been communicated directly. This kind of informal discussion enables senior officials to gain an overall view, and to understand the spirit in which the decisions are taken.

50. But the written word was still valuable. Important decisions have to be recorded with accuracy and clarity. A good discussion, well recorded, with decisions set out and attributed to the appropriate Ministers, is an authoritative record of what government has decided to do.

51. On occasion, the Principal official may find it necessary to issue notes for guidance of departments. Written instructions, or circulars, represent attempts to codify the rules to be followed in the submission of papers. It may also be possible to inaugurate a system of progress reports. For example, in Sri Lanka, a tabulation of cabinet decisions and departmental progress achieved is regularly circulated to Ministers. A similar list is also circulated on matters being considered in the central department of Finance and Planning. These reports mean that Ministers and officials have some indication of the speed with which decisions are implemented and can spot where delays occur.

52. But too elaborate a system of formal meetings and written instructions issued by officials for officials is sometimes criticised

by the politicians. Many of the methods employed to solve matters of co-ordination rest on confidence and trust between Ministers and civil servants. On occasion the Conference of Secretaries itself might be looked upon with some suspicion. In some situations, meetings of Permanent Secretaries might also fail to create an appropriate atmosphere of trust. The minutes of such meetings are recorded in some countries and sent to the Prime Minister. In others, formal meetings of this kind are limited by their terms of reference to establishment matters, such as leave, housing, pensions, and therefore do not stray into policy areas which are the responsibility of Ministers. But in general, the conference of secretaries' mechanism may be more difficult to develop in a formal way as a means of bringing a regular routine into discussions involving the co-ordination of the activities of different departments.

53. In countries where Conferences of Secretaries are confined largely to discussing public service matters, there is a further danger that they might be regarded as being too powerful by trades unions, or by junior civil servants. It was important to avoid letting the formal machinery which might be used to improve the quality of communication inside government fall into staff association disputes.

54. The first role of the Principal official in managing the machinery raises two interesting sets of problems. In the first place, it is not always clear what kind of policy analysis is required in any given administrative system, and where experts in long-range forecasting should be placed. Different parts of the machine need different kinds of 'analytic capacity'. It is important to discuss what provision can be made for having the appropriate results available when they are most needed. The institutional arrangements for taking advantage of techniques which improve the intelligence available to decision-makers can be very perplexing.

55. In the second place, many of the technical difficulties in improving co-ordination seem to stem from the fact that officials at the bottom or in the middle ranks of the hierarchy do not necessarily share the views of those at the top on the role and function of the organisation to which they all belong. The scarcest resource of any organisation is the time of its most senior members, and this cannot easily be harnessed in order to educate junior

staff in the basic purposes which are being pursued. Yet some promotion of a greater sense of common effort is essential to any system of management. The machinery requires a doctrine of public service.

III Administrative Advice for Political Purposes

56. The second role of the Principal official is to offer advice on how the machinery might be mobilised by the government in order to follow the political objectives which it wishes to pursue. Administrative instruments carry different connotations according to the context in which they are used. Ministers and heads of government have predilections for particular methods. The Principal official has a high sensitivity to the full implications of alternative courses of action in administrative arrangements.

Allocation of functions

57. The allocation of administrative duties and responsibilities is much more closely associated with political dispute than the day-to-day problems of co-ordination. The Principal official treads on most delicate ground when he gives advice on who should perform what function. Yet all administrative machines must be geared to the political purposes of those in power, and the Principal official is primarily responsible for advice on the instrumentation of the government machine.

58. There are two conflicting requirements. On the one hand, all governments have to create suitable political offices for their supporters. In systems where the tradition of parliamentary accountability is strong, the number of offices created may be regulated. On the other hand, all governments have to decide which set of functions can best be grouped together, either for specific political reasons or to improve the effectiveness of the machine. It is often very difficult to see the wisest course of action because the needs of policy administration are always changing. In countries particularly concerned with development planning, the administrative machine must also be able to handle all communications between the top and the bottom of the hierarchy, in order to relate planning goals to actual achievement in the field.