

IV Administration and Politics

94. It was recognised that the material covered in discussions on the five topics summarised in chapters II and III has a direct bearing upon another two which the meeting had time to handle only briefly, economic planning and senior personnel policy. A more extensive discussion of these subjects would have benefited from what had gone before. All the areas of interest have obvious inter-connections. In particular, the design of “support systems” in decision-making and the part played by financial procedures in administration are of great importance to considerations of economic planning. The style of the planning office is a function of the arrangements made for policy analysis and financial control. Furthermore, the difficulties to be faced in improving co-ordination between the agencies of government and in communicating official policies to the people cannot be separated from the major aspects of senior personnel policy. An explicit policy for the selection and training of civil servants is itself a method of improving co-ordination and communication.

95. The allocation of functions is an area of decision-making which touches directly on both economic planning and personnel policy. Indeed, one of the principal reasons why Principal officials do not always play the same part in tendering advice on these subjects is that heads of government vary the practice of allocating responsibilities for them.

96. The Commonwealth contains several distinct variations on the main forms of administrative action in these fields. The meeting found that the particular arrangements made in any given country to implement economic planning and senior personnel policy often illustrates the characteristic dilemmas of Principal officials. Such arrangements provide evidence on the different ways in which their two roles as the manager of the machinery and as principal adviser on policy matters can be combined. The most senior civil servant is always conscious of the many variations by which administrative procedures are linked to political purposes.

97. This chapter outlines the main points of the discussion on planning and personnel as well as the indications regarding the main areas of interest which might be included on future agendas, that emerged from the meeting.

Economic Strategy and Planning

98. The Principal official rarely has direct responsibility for economic planning machinery, except insofar as it is nearly always associated in some way with the office of the Prime Minister or President. Some authorities are convinced that the subject of planning should be attached to the responsibilities of the Head of Government. The degree to which it may be part of the "support system" at the centre of government is discussed in the second chapter. It is argued that a separate Ministry of Planning will always be at loggerheads with the Ministry of Finance or Treasury. Even where there are separate offices for the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, many advisers are increasingly aware of the need for a more positive role in co-ordinating government activity in economic matters.

99. An effective administrative structure for planning is politically important because it is associated with the development of "self-reliance". So much development planning and so many of the first planning commissions were staffed by expatriates that the subject was often associated with a dependence on outside countries for technical assistance. Even now, some smaller countries are obliged to send officials abroad as new trainees for education in the appropriate techniques, or for the experience of participating in conferences about the implementation of development plans.

100. Development programmes are also frequently dependent on overseas capital for investment. Part of the process of encouraging "self-reliance" is to reduce this sort of dependence on foreign assistance. For example, India had progressively reduced the proportion of foreign capital being considered in its development programmes from 25% to 8%.

101. The main internal difficulty in adapting the machinery of government is to find the most appropriate balance between central requirements and local agencies. All the necessary steps are concerned with the pattern of regional development. In a federal system there is usually a method of dividing resources between the constituent parts. But even centralised states have some kind of regional policy. The Principal official has often to consider recommendations on the use of the public sector to solve certain regional imbalances. For example, new industrial units in the public sector might be located on a preferential basis in backward

regions. Inducements can also be given to private capital in medium and small scale industries in order to persuade them to move into the less developed parts of the country, either through direct subsidies on capital investment or through subsidies for road transport or other forms of infrastructure. Most of the planning machinery involves area planning units. It is the job of the Principal official to see that such units are understood by and integrated with central agencies.

102. The main technical interest at the centre is the provision of an adequate information base for effective planning. The analysis of global figures is usually performed under the aegis of some central national council, such as the National Development Council in India or the National Action Council in Malaysia. Such a body usually sits under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister. It considers the appropriate new targets, and makes what it hopes are realistic forecasts of development. This kind of supreme central council makes it possible to consider the analytic work of the planning office.

103. It may also be necessary deliberately to promote research for science and technology through the central machinery. Some countries have established national committees in these fields, or have special research and development organisations inside the public sector. Each country needs machinery to consider the implications of new technologies.

104. But the main value of administrative procedures for politicians is their ability to transform the economic habits of ordinary people. Much of the work of development planning is seen in terms of educating people in standard economic practices. In many countries the rural sector cannot be modernised without the aid of government agencies in agricultural extension work or public health. The development of fertile land might be undertaken by government consolidation or rehabilitation authorities, and small-holders can be given capital assistance in finding the right seeds and farming machinery, as well as in improving marketing arrangements. It is sometimes particularly important to develop voluntary societies, on the lines of co-operative societies of farmers' or fishermen's associations, in order to organise and co-ordinate assistance in using new technologies and methods.

105. If there are subversive opposition movements, the security forces may also be involved. In some countries the armed services work on agricultural projects or road building. In Malaysia the Action Committee in each State is headed by the Chief Minister, but it consists not only of members of the State Executive Council and Heads of departments, but also of representatives of the army and police. The army and police are also represented at the district level in the action committee headed by the district officer.

106. One of the difficulties of incorporating so much government activity into the development process is that people in rural areas are likely to have their own expectations grossly inflated, and unless they are encouraged, they fail to contribute their own labour. In countries where a large proportion of the potential work force is unemployed, particularly if there are seasonal patterns of activity, it is important to utilize all manpower. Benefits sometimes come from labour-intensive public works, such as the construction of dykes and roads. In countries where many live close to subsistence level, taxation is difficult, but it is usually better to employ indirect rather than direct taxation.

107. From the point of view of the Principal officials, arrangements for economic planning can usually be placed between two ends of a spectrum, which runs from taking the first step in economic development at one end to managing a very complex economy at the other. Developing countries are principally concerned with modernization; developed countries with an adequate system of forward planning.

108. The Commonwealth contains a wide range of different experiences in this field. The previous chapter indicates how Principal officials may have to relate their activities to the scale, scope and state of their administration. Economic planning, more than any other area of policy, helps to underline the large number of different political contexts in which administrative activity is conducted.

Senior Personnel Policy

109. The identity of the Principal official is closely tied to the senior personnel policy which his government approves. Appointment at the top may often be as much a matter of personal commitment to the Head of Government or of political considerations as a matter of seniority in the public service.

110. There seems to be a difference of emphasis between those countries which maintain a non-partisan civil service, and those which acknowledge openly that senior civil servants must in some sense be partisan supporters of the government in power. This is especially true in those countries which have inherited a civil service based on the principle of a "political class", in which the senior administrators of the government machine cannot easily be divorced from the main political objectives of the regime in power. Administrators under the colonial system were taking what amounted to political decisions in their districts and departments. They were in a sense rivals to the politicians during the period of internal self-government. New states have therefore had to find their own set of solutions in the definition of a senior administrator's role, and thereby to establish the main lines of a senior personnel policy.

111. In those states with a one-party system, for example, it is possible to interchange the roles of ministers and senior civil servants. This transfer is sometimes openly encouraged. It is important to get the right balance at the top of any ministry or department between senior party members who are technically administrators and those who are elected representatives in a parliamentary system.

112. There are also advantages for civil servants wishing to protect their conditions of service if their senior colleagues carry weight in the party. For example, accusations made by departmental ministers against civil servants can be more fairly assessed if the Secretary to the Cabinet is himself a Cabinet Minister, as in Zambia. Chapter III shows that ministerial and permanent secretary status may be given to provincial officers. In Tanzania and Zambia the provincial administration is a recognised associate of the party apparatus.

113. An alternative in those countries which require commitment from their administrators but lack a sufficient number of experienced men, is for senior administrators to be recruited from the private sector. In Sri Lanka the Cabinet Secretary and 23 Secretaries to Ministries have been drawn from different fields, backgrounds, and age groups. Ten of them belong to the former Ceylon Civil Service; three have come from the recently constituted Ceylon Administrative Service; and the other ten are university professors, lawyers,

engineers, doctors, and economists. This experiment for bringing people into the top rank from outside the public service has produced very encouraging results.

114. It is always an important concern of the Principal official to ensure that the civil service is considered in some way “representative” of the people. Countries which have a strong parliamentary tradition usually have governments which are concerned to show that they are able to control the administration through the elected representatives. But senior personnel policy is really a reflection of political conditions. It may sometimes be necessary for senior administrators to organise their private lives in such a way that they are seen to be ‘neutral’ in politics. The non-partisan civil service is not necessarily incapable of responding to the pursuit of political objectives, if senior civil servants are scrupulous in their behaviour.

Conclusion

115. It seemed clear that future meetings of Principal officials would wish to discuss some of the problems which the Ottawa meeting found interesting, as well as worthy of further consideration across the different contexts which the Commonwealth provides. The Principal official’s role in managing the machinery of government involves him in tackling a range of complex problems. The meeting identified two areas of interest:

- (1) the style and type of long-range policy analysis and its proper institutional setting. It is not easy to guarantee that the appropriate units designed to support the process of decision-making can tender the results of their studies when they are wanted.
- (2) The best use of senior personnel in extending the understanding of more junior officials and in offering them opportunities to promote a better co-ordination of effort. Too prodigal an investment of time in trying to improve staff morale may endanger the effective functioning of the organisation.

116. The Principal official’s role in tendering advice on how the machinery might be given a sense of political direction was treated with three other areas of interest at the forefront of the discussion: