

INTRODUCTION

Edited extracts from a speech by Senator the Honourable Gordon Draper, Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, during the debate on the National Budget on 29 January 1992.

As we implement and institute mechanisms and measures which will ensure an efficient and effective public sector we are not alone. Similar programmes are under way in the private sector. Both arms are moving forward together for the development of our society.

The vision for an effective and efficient public service is driven by a commitment to reforming the public service in consultation with the public sector trade unions so as to ensure greater responsiveness to the needs of citizens, an improved quality of service, speedier delivery of services, greater efficiency in revenue collection and elimination of archaic systems which result in wastage of financial and human resources and greater accountability. In short, our vision of a public service is client-oriented, results-oriented and also one which will allow for rewards for performance.

Many efforts have been made in the past to reform the public service in Trinidad and Tobago, and one question that may be asked is: "Why is this different?" In 1964, a commission under J. O'Neil Lewis was established to report on the Role and Status of the Public Service in the age of Independence. That was followed in 1973 by a Report on a Futures Research seminar which put forward a case for reform of the administrative systems in Trinidad and Tobago. In 1975, an Administrative Improvement Programme Report was submitted by a UN project team. In 1981, a committee of permanent secretaries put forward their own proposals for improvement and efficiency in the public service. Between 1984 and 1986, a Public Service Review Task Force, chaired by Reginald Dumas, was established and between 1988 and 1991, an Administrative Reform Task Force was in place in this country.

Significantly, the task which has been entrusted to my Ministry is not to make *recommendations* for reform but to *implement* reform. Our own experiences in Trinidad and Tobago, and experiences in other parts of the world, indicate that one of the fundamental stumbling blocks to implementing public service reform is the lack of political will. In Trinidad and Tobago, that political will is now present.

We need to note however that reforming the public service is a Herculean effort. Administrative change needs to be managed very carefully. We need to take account of the actual elements which we wish to change, but as importantly, we

need to take account of the process we use to bring about that change. So that process, to my mind, is as important as content in this approach to implementing public service reform.

First, to deal with some of the elements of content, let me identify some of the common threads that have run through all those attempts at administrative reform to which I have referred above. There are a number of issues which have kept surfacing again and again:

- the need for us in the public service to review the system of laws, rules and procedures which regulate processes for public administration;
- the system of planning, both national and sectoral;
- the system of financial administration, including budgeting, accounting and financial control;
- the whole area of accountability;
- the system of human resource management, including recruitment, training, industrial relations, salary and wage administration;
- the system of human resource development;
- the management systems;
- the systems for tendering, procurement and supply of resources in the public service;
- the systems for records management; and
- the systems for providing accommodation, equipment and supplies.

In short, the documentation and plans which we have developed in recent years have articulated clearly the issues which need to be dealt with in any programme of public service reform. These form the basis of our own approach to implementing reforms.

If we are to bring about change, we have to build a climate of collaboration. That spirit and that climate of consensual decision-making and collaboration form the centrepiece of our implementation of public service reform. Indeed, this Government, as we took up office, started on the basis that we needed to understand how the public service worked because one of the impediments to real public service reform and change has to do with the approach and attitude of government

ministers to the public service; the failure of government ministers to understand their relationships with permanent secretaries and the public service; the concerns and confusions that arise as we attempt to understand the meaning of our Constitution which talks about the minister as manager and the permanent secretary as supervisor. It is our contention therefore, that public service reform fundamentally involves a clarification of that relationship.

All government ministers, before taking up office, spent time in training. A significant part of that training has ensured that all of us understand the relationship between ministerial office and public service office. In developing that spirit of consensual decision-making and collaboration, one of the three training days was shared with permanent secretaries and heads of department in the public service as well as with the trade unions. This is how the implementation of reform has begun.

Let me now turn for a while to some of the elements of reform itself, and some of the guidelines which we will use to implement that reform. Let me start by focusing on some very broad reform guidelines which will underpin much of what we do as we implement reform. If we reflect on the public service, a lot of the public service work has to do with the processing of information, therefore, the capacity of the public service to process information competently and speedily becomes a central part of its activity. We also recognise that the development of an efficient and effective public service will necessitate the use of cost-effective technologies and we propose to embark on activities which would lead to that.

I have already alluded to the notion of client-orientation. All public service departments and ministries have a client base. One of the key tasks of the public service, therefore, is to identify clearly the needs of those client bases and to work towards developing the goods and services to satisfy those needs. That client orientation, the thinking that goes into that, the training that goes into that, the management processes that will make that come alive will also become a central part of the implementation of reform.

We recognise that the public service also has to become more proactive. A critical component, therefore, of the implementation of our reform will be the insistence on the development of strategic plans in all ministries and, indeed, we have already heard from contributors that ministries are well under way to the development of those plans.

The issue of accountability has also continued to be one which has thread itself through all previous attempts to talk about public service reform. We are totally committed to putting in place the mechanisms and systems which will ensure real accountability. Training has also been talked about, and one in which we will have much to say and much to do as part of the implementation efforts.

Let me now, in elaborating on these, begin to sketch what are some of the areas which we shall be implementing over the next five years. There are no quick fixes. The strategic planning to which I referred and which will become a key plank in our implementation efforts, will allow all ministries to look over the next five years, to articulate clearly what the objectives and targets are. More than this, it will give all of us in this House, as well as the national community, yardsticks against which we can measure the performance of ministries and departments. It will also be a vital starting point for us eventually to roll down to a reform of the system of performance appraisal in the public service because we would then be able to link very directly the performance of individual public servants with the requirements of their departments in the ministries. It cannot happen in a vacuum. It has to be systematically planned.

A strategic plan is not a document. While a document forms part of it, I will contend that the process that we use to get to that document is as important as the document itself. Because we need plans within our ministries for which everyone in those ministries can take ownership. If people in the ministries and departments have to own the plans, they have to be involved in the process of planning. A significant part of our implementing public service reform therefore will call on public servants across the board to be involved in the process of strategic planning so that, at the end of the day, their plans will be *their* plans and we can move on to implementing them. It would also allow us, on an annual basis in this House, to ask for and to receive reports on the performance of individual ministries. That, I submit, would be one critical element of accountability.

One of the elements of our reform activity concerns management information systems. I will speak about some particular applications we are introducing.

One of the difficulties in managing the public service has to do with tracing correspondence and matters which come into ministries. We have therefore already instructed the National Information System Centre to implement, through the public service, a computerised registry system. It will allow us to respond more speedily to requests, queries, letters, etc. which come into ministries from members of the public. In other words, client-orientation suggests a need for a more speedy response to requests and letters which come in. The issue of management information systems will become a critical part of our implementation efforts.

One of the concerns which has also been voiced from time to time about the public service has to do with its capacity to plan, manage and analyse projects, particularly relatively large projects. We intend therefore to focus significant training resources on all elements of the project management segment, which will mean that we will develop within ministries a greater capacity to identify projects, to appraise them and to manage them. Part of this programme will also involve the development of a manual and operating procedures relating to projects which will permit us to

manage project-related activity, funding and so on, in a more effective and more efficient way.

The issue of accountability is critical in the task of implementing reform. There is an accountability cycle, which includes the budgetary process, the systems for identifying projects to go into the budget, and the controls which are put in place. We recognise that there needs to be a review of these elements in the budgetary cycle. Some elements of these have already been clearly identified and articulated in other reports.

I wish to speak briefly on two of those elements. The first has to do with the whole system and process of internal auditing, because the internal audit function must be seen as one of the fundamental elements of control within organisations. A recent comprehensive report by the Auditor General assesses the internal audit function in the public service. The report points to the absence of clear guidelines, standards and procedures for internal auditing; to the absence of audit manuals; to the fact that often audit plans do not cover all areas of operations; to the fact that financial budgets were at times non-existent, resulting in an absence of financial control. It speaks to the fact that job specifications were not always available. It speaks to the fact that training programmes were lacking and that there were lengthy delays in replying to audit queries.

Again, the findings and the recommendations find their way very easily into our discussions relating to implementing reform. Improving the internal audit function would certainly significantly impact on the process of accountability.

The Government is also committed to institutionalising in the public service a system of comprehensive auditing or value for money auditing. In thinking about the use of resources in the public service, and indeed outside public service, we need to be concerned with how well these resources have been used with respect to efficiency, economy and effectiveness. It is vital therefore that we spend time and effort in enquiring from time to time how well we are doing across, not only our financial resources, but all other resources. The Auditor General's reports examine internal audit and information systems. It is our view that all of the measures, procedures and support necessary to institutionalise comprehensive auditing must be in place in the public service, and indeed will be a part of our own implementation effort for public service reform.

I turn now to a range of activities which may be subsumed under the broad heading of "human resource management and human resource development" which are also central elements of the implementation of our reform efforts in the public service. We will review and develop new approaches and systems for the training and development of all categories of staff in public service. We will, in the short-term pay particular attention to training in the areas of budget management and inter-

personal relationships for those persons who are in contact with the public. We recognise that we need to have more meaningful access to technical assistance in the area of training and to utilise in a more meaningful way the efforts and approaches of international agencies to the training of public servants. We also recognise the need to work with other agencies. We look forward to collaborating with the University of the West Indies and other training institutions, as we develop a new thrust and approach to the task of training and developing our public servants. We recognise that as our environment has changed so the requirements of and demands on our public servants have changed. Unless we implement measures to ensure that they continue to be equal to the task then they will be seen as unable to satisfy some of the demands of our society.

In this context I would like to note also the importance of computer literacy. Computer training will be one of the cornerstone elements of public service training.

Accommodation comes under the umbrella of "human resource management" and we are acutely aware that the physical environment is one of the critical elements which will determine levels of productivity and efficiency in public service. We therefore intend to address the issues relating to the standards and design of office accommodation for the public service.

Drug abuse in our society is a concern and we propose to implement across the public service, systems of employee-assistance programmes which will allow public servants to have access to counselling and treatment, not only for drug abuse, but for any other issues which may be impacting on their performance.

One of the elements which impacts on performance and efficiency in the public service has to do with the range of laws and regulations which seem to engulf the public service. These laws and regulations need to be changed so that they are in line with a modern, efficient and productive public service. This year, therefore, we will be bringing a number of revised regulations and bills relating to the public service in all its areas – civil service, prisons, police, fire – geared to ensuring that we now have in place a legal framework which will facilitate the efficient and effective management of our public service.

We also have to treat the issue of performance appraisal in the public service. While we are aware that the existing system in place for appraisal in the public service could be used better than it has been, we are also acutely aware of the fact that modern human resource management principles dictate a revision and an implementation of new approaches to performance appraisals.

We intend to begin the implementation of new approaches to performance appraisal in the public service. Again, both the design and implementation will be done on

the basis of collaboration and consultation with the public service unions. We recognise that the implementation of new performance appraisal systems will require changes in behaviour and an acceptance on the part of public service managers and supervisors that a fundamental part of performance appraisal has to do with counselling to bring about changes in behaviour in public servants. We propose therefore to design and embark on a range of training activities geared to ensuring a clear understanding of the new forms and approaches and the role which performance appraisal must play in the overall management of the human resource.

A survey carried out in 1985 on the public service sought to determine the extent to which public servants were aware of what had gone into their appraisal forms. It was discovered that almost ninety per cent of public servants were not aware of what had been put on their forms. This is clearly counter-productive and is not the kind of activity which will lead to high levels of productivity and efficiency. Feedback on performance is a critical element of human resource management. The new forms, therefore, and the training associated with them will ensure that kind of situation will no longer exist.

We are also painfully aware that one of the constraints under which the public service currently operates is a classification system that goes back to the 1960s. We recognise that a review of the classification system of the public service will clearly take more than one year. In fact, our initial estimates suggest that it will take somewhere in the region of two years. We propose however to begin the process because, as I have alluded to earlier, the environment has changed and the nature of public service jobs has changed. In some cases piecemeal efforts have been made to review the classification system but the time has now come for a wholesale revision of that system. Part of our implementation of reform will lead us in that direction.

We are also aware that when we think about the public service, we need at times to be more mindful of elements relating to cost and cost recovery. As part of our implementation of reform therefore, we will be looking at the public service in terms of cost centres and seek, where possible, a more meaningful return for services delivered by the public service. Where services are provided to the public at large, including the private sector, insufficient attention has been paid to the costing of these services in relation to the real cost of providing them. In the context of some of our discussions on revenue, we need to examine some of these activities and we propose to do so.

One of the elements of the public service which is under pressure is collective bargaining machinery, and we propose to implement mechanisms to improve the industrial relations climate, reduce the number of grievances which arise, and generally allow for a more harmonious relationship to exist between public service workers.

The objectives of a revised joint consultative machinery are threefold:

- to meet the need for a systematic channel of communication between management and staff;
- to provide for the participation of staff in management decision-making, within specified limits; and
- to set up a grievance procedure for the discussion of cases where a recognised association wishes to make representations.

In short, mechanisms for consultation and the development of a climate within which the parties who work in the public service could meet and treat with each other in a non-threatening, non-alienating way.

We propose to ensure the establishment of joint consultative committees in all ministries of public service.

What I have outlined provides, I hope, an indication of the range of areas and issues which the implementation of reform will take into account. I would stress that we are no longer at the stage where we are writing and submitting reports, we are at the stage of implementing them.

We are confident that not only will we *implement*, but that having implemented, we will *deliver* to the public of Trinidad and Tobago an efficient and effective public service that, together with the private sector, can facilitate and foster economic growth – a public service which all of us will love and of which we can be proud.