



ADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT

The Role of Productivity in National Development

BY

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Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members of the House of Assembly,

I am pleased, once again, to extend my sincere good wishes for the good health and well being of yourself and families. I also offer my greetings to all our national living here and abroad.

This occasion gives me the opportunity to officially congratulate Honourable Members on their success at the polls and I wish you a successful and fruitful term of office.

I take the opportunity to congratulate people of Dominica as a whole on the disciplined exercise of their democratic rights. I also wish to compliment the Electoral Commission, the electoral officers and other administrative staff for their methodical, systematic and fair conduct of the elections.

In any democracy, the people do want and have the right to change governments from time to time, according to their wishes, in a peaceful and orderly manner. Democracy is the rule of law. It is also the rule of reason. It is in fact a rule of consent. In a healthy democracy, both the ruling party and the opposition have a responsibility to the country, and surely the people will judge them in the discharge of that responsibility. I am of the opinion that apart from the responsibility that devolves on the government and on the opposition, a great responsibility rests with the people themselves. It is wrong to think that only governments have the duty to maintain law and order, peace, harmony and progress.

The citizen bears an equal responsibility in this regard. Citizenship, it has rightly been said, is a bond; a bond between the citizens and State in which one sustains and is sustained by the other.

The assumption of office of any new government confers on it many new opportunities. But the most important of these is the opportunity to strengthen the bonds between the citizen and the State. Both working together can generate a kinetic energy as could transform our Dominican way of life.

I wish to suggest that it is the responsibility of opposition parties to co-operate with Government in solving national problems. You have a responsibility to allow the duly-elected Government to function. Government and Opposition must work together in matters like national integration and communal harmony. We must always bear in mind that economic growth requires a stable political environment. Experience has amply demonstrated that in the absence of such stability the entire country suffers.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Member,

A National Productivity Consciousness

Within recent months much thought has been given to the approach that this Country stands to derive considerable gain from the development of national productivity consciousness as a prerequisite to the establishment of a national productivity drive. Our citizens should then be able to bring to bear in their work orientations increased enthusiasm and organizational commitment which should contribute to increased organizational performance and effectiveness.

There has to be first of all the development of productivity improvement strategies in the Public Service, so as to set the stage for a clear understanding of the challenges and constraints impacting on Government and serve to identify the strategies and tactics for removing those constraints and tackling the challenges. After this, the Public Service should be able to produce action plans to improve its productivity. Attention can then be focused on bringing all the parties to industrial relations in the country together to draft a national productivity improvement plan. I wish to stress that without the improvement of productivity in the Public Service there can be no improvement of productivity in this Country. The important consideration here is the critical role the Public Service plays in this regard.

The Public Service serves as the filter through which national development plans emerge and through which the other social institutions in the society are able to function effectively. A productive public service creates the conditions under which the social and physical infrastructure of the Country is optimized, which will in turn contribute to a vibrant and growing sector. A productive public sector is therefore a necessary and required condition for a vibrant private sector.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

We may well ask, what is meant by productivity in the Public Service? The simple answer is, the rendering of more services to Dominicans on a year to year basis with no corresponding increases in budget allocations and for providing the same range of services to Dominicans at lower costs. The less time it takes to achieve results, all other things being equal, the more productive is the government ministry. Regardless of the ministry or department of government, this measure of productivity remains the same.

At the very top we see productivity in the efficiency, effectiveness and expeditiousness with which government policies, strategies and programmes are formulated. These immediately influence the laws, regulations and ministerial practices which in turn impact positively on the efficiency of government agencies, the physical and social infrastructure and on fiscal and monetary measures and incentives.

In the final analysis, before we can improve productivity in the public service, it seems to me that we have to review the factors that impact on the time it takes to serve the public and to implement government policy in respect of providing services to the public.

There is a serious question which must be considered. Is there flexibility in our government rules and regulations or are they so rigid as to provide a shield for the ineptitude and inertia of some unimaginative and unmotivated public managers? If the former is true, then the end product is likely to be high productivity. If the latter, then the country would be heading for disaster and immediate corrective action would be indicated.

An unproductive public service, for whatever reason, leads to what productivity improvement experts call the “low productivity trap”. Organizations in the country become unproductive as private sector managers find their decision making constrained by cumbersome rules and regulations. The final consequence being the sub-optimization of natural development with relative price instability, balance of payments disequilibrium, high unemployment and negative economic growth.

We must try to ensure, at all costs, that the low productivity trap does not take root in our public service. What is particularly ironic about what consequences follow the decline in productivity of a nation is that assistance is usually sought from the multilateral Monetary fund, and the prescription usually offered by these institutions is the misunderstood Structural Adjustment Programme, (SAP) for short. And an essential feature of SAP is the reform of the Public Service of the nation by reference to productivity improvement.

It seems to me therefore, that we should continually seek ways and means to maintain and improve productivity in a proactive manner.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

It is now important to consider the next issue relating to the question why do public services become unproductive? According to the experts there are several reasons which explain this phenomenon. Perhaps the primary reason is the failure of public services to change their strategies and structures as their external environment changes. An adaptation of rules and regulations is necessary to avoid civil servants having to make decisions in the 1990's against the backdrop of rules of the 1950's and before.

The systematic development of a cadre of professional managers with a common body of managerial knowledge is required. A point I wish to make here is that too often a professional technocrat is appointed to a managerial position and is not provided with managerial training. While the individual may be very competent in their field and is promoted to a decision making position because of such competence, he or she is left to develop managerial skills by trial and

error. One consequence of this fact is that a lack of team spirit and an esprit de corps fails to emerge among the principal decision makers as they pursue their organisational obligations from their own technical perspective.

Communication Problems

Appropriate communication channels are also required so as to avoid the monopolisation by certain decision makers as one way of maintaining power. Under such conditions an organisation is unable to develop proactive strategies necessary to cope with its external environment. Events emerge and the organisation is then caught up with attempts to react to these events. Students of bureaucracies have noted that one unintended consequence is that information tends to be monopolized by some decision makers at certain levels as one way of maintaining their power. This also results in the failure of the lower levels to transmit vital information up the hierarchy and the result is that everyone in the organisation tries to monopolize information whatever its utility.

Communication among human beings has always been a problem. But it is only fairly recently that management advisers have become so concerned about it and the way it works or does not work in the public service and in industry.

Real communication occurs, when we listen with understanding. This means to see the expressed ideas and attitude from the other person's point of view, to sense how it feels to them, to achieve their frame of reference in regard to the thing they are talking about. Stated so briefly, this may sound absurdly simple, but it is not.

The motivation of Employees

The Motivation and performance of public servants must be monitored at all times, and performance evaluation systems put in place and consistently carried out. The results on the other hand, must be integrated into their compensation increments so as to avoid public servants trying to make amends by adjusting their motivation and performance levels. There should also be continuous reviews of wages and salaries between the public and private sectors.

In the best organisations, performance criteria are clear, promotion procedures are fair, the mood is informal, leaders are accessible, rewards are regular depending on performance, and there is a sense of forward movement.

It is crucial that the procedures of evaluation and promotion provide equity, they must assure fairness. People need the protection of procedures that diminish the importance of internal politics. Equitable procedures must be concerned with performance reports, the composition of groups who make personnel decisions, and the rights of employees who are being considered. If there are doubts about fairness, then anxiety, mistrust and alienation follow.

The psychology of motivation is tremendously complex, and what has been unravelled with any degree of assurance is small indeed. Motivation is based on growth needs. It can be compared to an internal combustion engine, and its benefits show up over a long period of time. The ultimate reward in motivation is personal growth.

Different needs of human beings are involved here, and it is important to note that the growth or motivation factors that are intrinsic to the job are: achievement, recognition for achievement, the work itself, responsibility and growth and advancement.

The executives have to be clear about the organisation's goals so they can articulate how people's work contributes to reaching them. People need to know the organisation's progress towards its central mission and understand how their part contributes. This is to be articulated again and again, because when people don't have that sense of the big picture, it's easy to see only details and feel insignificant. The organisation must continuously inform people – particularly those with little opportunity for promotion – in very specific ways that it needs and values their contribution.

Nothing creates more self-respect than being included in the process of decision making. It doesn't take much, it just takes some thought. Respect for individuals includes the recognition that people may have different amounts or kinds of ambition at different times in their lives.

People flourish best and most effectively when they perceive their organisation as an excellent one that makes a significant social contribution and a serious commitment to them. They want to know that the organisation is aware of them and values their contribution.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

So far I have discussed the negative side, that is, what transpires when unproductive relations are present in the public service. Let us focus now on the positive aspect on what happens when productivity is present. We know from the empirical evidence that a certain chain of events takes place, for example: Higher productivity in the public service leads to a competitive private sector leading to productive organisations in that sector. This results in cheaper pricing of goods and services, leading to more buyers of goods and services. More buyers of goods and services lead to greater profits resulting in increased investment in technology, the expansion of the private sector and better wages and working conditions. An expanding private sector creates more employment, more advancement opportunities and greater economies of scale and the diversification of business organisations. Greater national income and government revenues are generated. More government revenue leads to better social services, better infrastructure for industry and commerce. Foreign investment is created and higher standards of living and economic growth are realised.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Development of Human Resources

Skill creation per se can be extremely wasteful if it is not properly tailored to the requirements of the country, both quantitatively and qualitatively. In the case where industrialisation is already underway, governments are faced with the problems of identifying occupations for which skill training is required, making good the loss of skilled manpower through emigration while improving the existing stock of skills, monitoring the relevance of training and providing the necessary incentives to attract people to and retain them in important occupations. A coherent strategy for developing a country's human resources encompasses a wide range of policy areas which include education, training, incomes, labour supply and employment. However, few developing countries, possess the institutional and policy-making capacity needed for preparing such a strategy. Moreover, manpower planners receive advice from many different quarters and it is difficult for them to know precisely where their priorities should lie. They need first to understand the macro-economic framework in which the labour force operates and to identify the main labour market issues before they can decide on priorities and make accurate projections for the future.

The same principles applies to the public service and the quality of civil service personnel depends on the capacity of training institutions and the Service to select, as well as train young people for civil service careers. Wrong selection leads to high drop-out rates and therefore a waste of training resources.

The quality and source of the Public Service is a strategic factor in the development of the society as a whole. The challenge is up to the Civil Service to retain a position of strength through its specialization of knowledge, its involvement in the success of programmes and the acceptance by politicians and public as a vital cog in the machinery of successful government administration. Any deterioration in the Service can seriously embarrass the implementation of the best plans for national development. The performance of the Public Service is the locomotive by which development takes place. Civil Servants are in the vanguard of development.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

The Function of Government

The primary function of a Government is to maintain law and order. To this, time has added other services – roads, schools, public health, surveys, research and on and on in a constantly growing list. Side by side with these internal functions are the external relations of government involving the protection of citizens, the making of treaties, war and so on.

Governments are also found operating in many ways which are relevant to economic growth. Nine categories of functions can be distinguished; maintaining public services, influencing attitudes, shaping economic institutions, influencing the use of resources, influencing the distribution of income, controlling the quantity of money, controlling fluctuations, ensuring full employment, and influencing the level of investment. We all should therefore be concerned with the relation between Government and the economy as a whole with particular reference to relations with the private sector.

The Civil Service

As indicated, the range of activities which governments can usefully undertake is very wide. However, it is even wider in less developed than in the more developed economies. On the other hand, the governments of the less developed countries are at the same time less capable of taking on a wide range of functions than are the governments of the more developed. Their administrations are sometimes found to be more corrupt and less efficient and a smaller part of the national income can be spared for government activity. This is another of the paradoxes of economic growth. It is very easy to overload the government of less developed economies and it is quite clear that it is better for them to confine themselves to what they can manage than take on an excessive range of services. This is of particular relevance to international technical assistance programmes.

Modern Governments

Beneath the political structure, there is a central administrative structure, embracing government departments, divisions, public corporations and a wide range of ad hoc administrative bodies, manned by staff recruited on a career basis clearly different from that by which elected politicians secure their essentially temporary and almost arbitrarily terminable positions. This of course is the traditional method by which the marriage of responsible and expert government has been sought. The policy framework is the responsibility of politicians (reacting as necessary to a variety of pressures both inside and outside the political world they inhabit), within this framework – and subject to their direction – career officials run the administrative machines. For the purpose of analysis a dichotomy is often made between the political and administrative arms of government.

Indeed, the academic subject called “public administration” essentially rests on this dichotomy, upon the premises that career personnel of administration – the “bureaucracy” – can be studied separately from the overtly political process. This has its analytic value, but the real process of administration cannot be seen in these terms only – the whole process is inter-penetrated with politics. A key factor in any study of our Dominican bureaucracy must be the relationship between senior civil servants and ministers, both their own departmental ministries and the whole political machinery of Cabinet government.

But whatever defects may or may not be discerned in the Civil Service and the way it has developed over the years, there is general agreement on the vital nature of its functions in the vastly changed role of government, particularly since achieving Independence.

To meet these new tasks of government, our Civil Service must be able to handle the social, economic, scientific and technical problems of our times, in an international setting. Because the solutions of complex problems need long preparation, the Service must be far-sighted; from its accumulated knowledge and experience, it must show initiative in working out what are the needs of the future and how they ought to be met. In the anticipation of future needs a special responsibility rests on the Civil Service, because one Parliament or even one government often cannot see the process through. At the same time the Civil Service works under political direction and under the obligation of political accountability having regard to all that is implied. As a general rule, every executive function, whether superior or subordinate, should be the appointed duty of some given individual.

It should be apparent to everyone who did everything, and through whose default anything was left undone. Responsibility is null when nobody knows who is responsible. To maintain this principle at its highest level there must be one person who receives the whole praise of what is well done, the whole blame of what is ill. Civil Servants thus have to have a lively awareness of the political implications of what they are doing or advising and sufficient flexibility to serve governments of any political-complexion. In all its activities the Civil Service has to remember that it exists to serve the whole community, and that imaginative humanity sometimes matters more than tidy efficiency and administrative uniformity. Too often the administrative Public Servants think of themselves as advisers on policy to people above them than rather as managers of the administrative machine below them.

In many instances there is not enough contact between the Public Service and the rest of the Community, and consequently insufficient awareness of how the world outside works, how government policies affect it, and what new ideas and methods are being developed elsewhere.

The Civil Service is concerned with the conduct of the whole range of government activities as they affect the community, ranging from policy formation to carrying out the day-to-day duties that public administration demands.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

The Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy has been made into a new variety of sin in many people's minds, but bureaucrats doing their job conscientiously are on the side of all good men and time. Bureaucracy is a way of doing business, a way without which we could not carry on today's complex affairs.

The word has been degraded in everyday talk until it raises sub-consciously, a spirit of anti-official jocularly. As in most features of life, there is much to be said for and against the system of bureaucracy. The good should not suffer by the faults of some of those who administer it, and irresponsible attacks upon public servants, workers in industry, and people who serve in social, cultural and community activities, are a luxury that no democracy can afford. Those who speak and write against bureaucracy are in reality criticizing the system of government and business, and the bureaucrat is merely the handy scapegoat.

Neither government nor business can be carried on without bureaucrats. They are the people who realise in practice the Government's policies and the plans of business.

The Civil Servant is expected to know intimately a labyrinth of rules and legal requirements, processes and procedures with which there is no reason for the man-in-the-street to be acquainted. The Civil Servant is there to act as a guide through the maze. Ideally, he protects the citizen against despotic arbitrariness.

This system is not, as some people think, an outgrowth of too much democracy. Nowhere do bureaucrats flourish as luxuriously as under an autocratic regime where they are treated with contemptuous patronage by their superior and find compensation only in plaguing the life of the public.

A certain amount of office routine is necessary for the functioning of any administrative system. How far it gets ossified and develops the ills possible in bureaucracy depends upon the vigilance of the leadership. It is part of the bureaucrat's business to have an orderly mind, but this orderliness must not be allowed to become the chief aim of life.

For their very existence both Government and business demand a deliberative approach to problems. Certain restraints and restrictions are not only necessary; they are inevitable; and despite the endless gibes thrown their way, they are desirable when the broad view is taken.

The thing to do is to view the contacts between bureaucrats and the public from both sides, and for both parties to make the effort necessary to make the contacts as pleasurable as possible. We should bear in mind that it takes courage and energy to take people out of grooves.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Conclusion

It goes without saying that both a productive public service and a vibrant private sector are necessary for economic growth and development in this Country.

The first step on the road towards the development of a national productivity consciousness has already been taken. The rationale behind the strategy to be adopted is to elicit the views and comments of public sector decision makers about a plan of action to boost the productivity of the Public Sector.

To this end two productivity seminars/workshops of two days duration each were held earlier this year for over one hundred and twenty (120) top and senior civil servants. Later, a smaller group of these officers attended a two day workshop on Human Resource Planning, Development and Utilisation. Follow-up activities have already been planned.

In addition senior officers had an opportunity to interact with the Public and Police Services Commissions and exchange views on productivity issues in the public service and to see how these Commissions could work in tandem with the administration.

The ultimate aim must be the establishment of an organisation which would in the long run, try to create a favourable climate so as to include the entire population in establishing national goals and priorities, and to enhance the productivity culture in Dominica by all appropriate means.

I wish the Personnel Services Division and all others concerned every success in this useful and important undertaking.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

May this session of this Honourable House be successful, and I implore the Almighty to guide your deliberations.