



ADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT

The Task of Public Administration

BY

HIS EXCELLENCY SIR CLARENCE SEIGNORET, GCB, OBE

President of the Commonwealth of Dominica

Collar of the Order of the Liberator (Simon Bolivar)

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

OPENING OF THE FIRST MEETING

OF THE THIRD SESSION OF THE FOURTH PARLIAMENT

ON MONDAY, 22nd JUNE, 1992

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members of the House of Assembly,

Introduction

I am very concerned about the criticism being levelled against the Administration and the Public Service in the Local Press and elsewhere.

My concern dates back some years now, and I have dealt with various aspects of the Public Administration, in my Messages of 1984, 1985 and 1990. On this occasion I have selected for my Theme "The Task of Public Administration".

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Government and administration are not new inventions. They are as old as the history of human beings working together in large groups.

There is however today, a great deal new about public administration. Its purposes have been completely reoriented, its functions have enormously increased in number, variety and complexity, and its methodology has grown from the trial-and-error state into an orderly discipline with an organised, ever-increasing body of knowledge and experience.

The purposes of public administration have been completely reoriented because the ends of the modern State have been revolutionized.

In its role as the prime mover and stimulator of national development, it is expected to achieve these purposes within the general framework of the consent of the people, and with due regard to the rule of law and individual human rights.

The twentieth century, then, is witnessing an extension of governmental functions beyond all precedent.

The Administrative Lag

The increase in the variety, number and complexity of functions that have to be performed has resulted in an administrative lag. A serious imbalance exists between aspirations and performance, between the needs to be met and the adequacy of the administrative machinery to carry out the plans and programmes it has made. Success in turn depends upon an effective Public Service.

Leadership and Administrative Reform

There is no quick and easy road to better public administration. The public sees the results of inefficiency but cannot trace the cause. To translate vague dissatisfaction into a definite programme of action, the first prerequisite is effective leadership in promoting administrative reform, with the advice and assistance of technically competent staff.

To succeed, such leadership must operate simultaneously at two levels: political and administrative.

Public Administration and the Citizen

A State, whatever its form, has three constituent elements – the citizen, the political leaders and the career officials. However, the citizen in most cases are the least well organised and least articulate element in this triangular partnership. Their interests and rights may be disregarded if the political and administrative leadership does not take steps to maintain the rule of law and to "involve" the people in matters of State.

From the citizen's point of view, public administration is an instrument, not an end of government, and although, as with any other instrument, it is worth having a good one, what matters most to the citizen is how it is used and for what purpose. The fundamental aims and objectives which an administration should serve are: to safeguard "the dignity and worth of the human person" and to promote "social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom" and to ensure "respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion."

To uphold these principles is primarily the concern of the political leaders, who are responsible for the laws and policies of the State. But these principles need also to be loyally implemented by the Public Service. The career officials must accept their role as servants not masters of citizens, devoted to their pursuit not of their own interests but of the general well being. And they need to adjust their procedures so that not even the humblest citizen shall be deprived of certain specific rights in relation to the Public Service.

This Country needs now, more than ever before, performance, progress and change. Power and responsibility are passing to a new generation who must be made aware that the Public Service should be in a very real sense belong to the society it serves, sharing its culture, its values, its problems and its ambitions. Even when external advice and assistance are available and accepted, they must be given an indigenous character, for public administration is an integral part of a nation's institutions.

In recent times we have discussed a number of subjects which have a bearing on the working of our democratic way of life, and are not easily understood by others – indeed some are not so much understood as taken for granted by many of us.

We live in an age when shabby ideologies promise short-cuts and some people take the undramatic realities of society and sculpture them into images, then fervently stir up followers.

They marry selfishness and ignorance, and breed conflict between races, creeds, individuals and even countries.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

The fact of the supremacy of the political chief of a department is probably well enough known to anyone with even a trifling acquaintance of our system of Government, but it is unreasonable to expect the ordinary intelligent citizen of a country, newly emerged to nationhood, with a largely elected parliament and a Public Service, to appreciate what is needed to make the relationship of Minister and Public Servant work satisfactorily.

What did Mr. Gladstone, (a former British Prime Minister), say in 1879 speaking on the subject of Cyprus in the House of Commons, he said: "It is the old story.

The English authorities go into a country possessed with the idea that there is no land in the world like England, and that the people of all other countries ought to conform to English customs, and that if they do not conform, so much the worse for them."

His indictment no doubt includes the implication that English customs were so transparently obvious that they needed no explanation. Anybody could conform to them and understand how they worked and what their purpose was.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

The British system works because institutions depend a great deal on the character and history of the people who developed them. Fortunately for us, numerous books, reports and papers have been written over the years on the system and we can learn from these. However, we must be careful not to take the system for granted, and we must continually look for better ways in achieving success.

Like other people, the British could only pass on what they knew and understood themselves. Their whole system of Government, developed over hundreds of years, depends and rests upon public confidence in the honour and integrity of those, whether Minister or Civil Servant.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Political Independence

In the history of nations there are decisive landmarks, events which decide irrevocably the destiny of a Country. Among these historic events is Political Independence.

On embarking upon this new status on the 3rd of November, 1978, this Country had a significant advantage. There was a gradual transition from one form of political dependence on Britain to another. There was the opportunity to learn from the experience of its relationship with Britain. Their experience and history are like a great book for all to read. We have inherited –no, we have adopted the Westminster Model of Government, and it is now our responsibility to do all we can to make the system work. And this is important, because the system does not become our own until we make it our own. To do so we must understand its intricacies fully and do everything possible to raise the level of our awareness. Our parliamentarians, our Public Servants and the people of this Country must understand the system, otherwise we will be heading for chaos. This comment of course applies to any other system of government which we may adopt in the future.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

The Dominica Constitution provides for all the trappings for our system of Government, quite possibly, some improvements are in order. The Protection of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, the establishment of the office of President as a Constitutional Head of State, Parliament, The Executive, Finance, The Public Service, Citizenship, Judicial Provisions, Parliamentary Commissioner and certain other Miscellaneous provisions. It is interesting to note that the Leader of the Opposition is provided for under the Chapter dealing with the Executive.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

The Characteristics of Cabinet

At the top of the governmental structure is the President. Parliament consists of the President and a House of Assembly, and the executive authority of Dominica is vested in the President, who subject to the provisions of the Constitution exercises his authority either directly or through officers subordinate to him.

Cabinet shapes the broad lines of policy carried out by the administration, and it rests on some important principles, namely:-

- Ministers are all members of the House of Assembly;
- Collective responsibility of all members of Government for anything of high importance that is done in every branch of the public business; Cabinet always acts as a unit;

- Ministers are members of a majority, answerable to that majority and ultimately to the electors whose will creates the majority;
- Selection, normally inclusively from one party;
- The fifth principle is personal ministerial responsibility. This means that the control of public affairs is in the hands of politicians who are constantly answerable in the House. It has been said that good government is the power to find the proper "man to hang if things go wrong". In return for great power there must be great responsibility. The symbol of this is Question Time. Of course, there are rules governing this.
- The sixth principle is the predominance of the Prime Minister who is the keystone of the Cabinet Arch.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Personal ministerial responsibility requires a well-informed lay-man rather than an expert at the head of a Ministry. What is wanted is the cool, mature judgement of the shrewd man of the world. There is no recipe of experience to qualify for a successful Minister. He may be a complete amateur; he may have had some previous first-hand knowledge in the field. In every case he is backed by a non-partisan, permanent, anonymous Public Service. But if there is trouble the Minister is publicly responsible; he cannot blame an unknown public servant.

Above all, Ministers must be able to hold their own in the Assembly. They need to have a thorough knowledge of parliamentary procedures and administrative grasp. The personal qualities most needed are a wide general understanding, quickness to seize essential points, and the ability and courage to make rapid decisions. Ministers must not only have the ability to make sensible judgements of affairs; it is equally necessary for them to make accurate judgements of men. It will also be an advantage if Ministers are not only convincing in the Assembly, but persuasive in the country.

These are exacting requirements. It is unfortunately true that sometimes Ministers fall short of them. One party may not even have enough first-class men to call upon.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Collective Responsibility

Let us examine the meaning of collective responsibility.

A Minister speaks not only as the Head of his own department, but also on behalf of the Cabinet as a whole. Collective responsibility means that all members of the Cabinet are responsible for all

government policies and actions. Any individual Minister must be prepared to support the policies which his colleagues endorse, or else resign.

A necessary concomitant to collective responsibility is Cabinet secrecy, and this formal doctrine is in many ways an austere one. Cabinet Ministers have their full share of personal ambitions and will, in any case, have conflicting views about policy objectives and the means for realising them. The one weapon an individual Minister can wield apart from his own political or departmental importance or his powers of persuasion, is the threat of resignation.

Most internal Cabinet dissensions – and there must necessarily be many when complex and intractable problems are under discussion – stop short of a formal breach of collective responsibility by resignation.

The Role of the Prime Minister

The most important member of the Cabinet is, without any question, the man or woman who forms it – the Prime Minister. There is nothing particularly new about this in the system.

Authorities on the subject have commented on the "exceptional and peculiar authority" of the Prime Minister, whose power in an emergency is "not inferior to those of a dictator." But the same authority also used the phrase "premus inter pares" (first among equals) to describe the Prime Minister's role, and this, rather than the other elements in his description, has attracted the most attention.

Undoubtedly, the Prime Minister has by far the most important position in the government hierarchy but that does not necessarily imply the Cabinet's relegation to merely advisory status: the relationship is one of mutual interdependence, not of unilateral dominance.

The Office of the Prime Minister

The office of Prime Minister, like most superior offices, depends very much on what the holder makes of it, though it also depends on tradition and convention.

The President's most important function is to choose a Prime Minister. Usually, he has no real choice. If a party wins the elections its leader must become Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister is, in the first place, the President's private adviser. Though the President does not take part in politics, he must still be consulted. His relations with the Prime Minister shall therefore be close. Indeed, the Constitution prescribes that the Prime Minister shall keep the President fully informed concerning the general conduct of the government.

The management of the party majority, both in Parliament and in the country, is a fundamental task, to which the Prime Minister must direct his or her energy.

The management of the party is of great importance. It involves careful attention to the shifts of opinion, an almost intuitive understanding of the ordinary man's way of thought, a capacity to read easily through the web of intrigues which ambitious politicians weave about them, and in short a truly remarkable capacity for judgment.

Next, the Prime Minister is President of Cabinet. He or she must pick a team and keep it as a team. A team of politicians is probably the most difficult to handle because, though each of them knows that his political future depends on the success of the team, there will usually be a few who are anxious to become captain. It is never very easy to draw the line between personal ambition and anxiety for the public weal.

The management of the Cabinet is certainly the Prime Minister's most difficult function, because it compels her, (in our circumstance), to take difficult decisions not only on the substance but also on the tactics.

The Prime Minister is not, however, concerned only with Cabinet questions. She must keep an eye on what goes on in the Departments since any Ministerial decision may cause political controversy. The Prime Minister must at least keep one eye open over the Ministries. Her success depends upon her ability to give sound advice almost on the spur of the moment.

She must be readily available, her mind clear and her judgement rapid and efficient. If he or she is intellectually lazy or difficult of approach they cannot exercise these functions properly.

Next, there is the function of managing the House of Assembly. This is not quite the same as that of managing the party majority, for the House has a life and a tradition of its own. The Prime Minister should be what is called 'a good House of Assembly man', someone who observes its traditions, rules and knows how to handle it.

This by no means exhausts the list of functions applicable to the Prime Minister. It can be said that all roads in the Constitution lead to the Prime Minister. From the Prime Minister leads the road to the President, Parliament, the Ministers, other members of the Commonwealth and even the Courts of Law.

It is obvious that very few Prime Ministers will exercise all these functions equally well, for they demand qualities too varied in type. Success in the House of Assembly is usually the guarantee of success as Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

The House of Assembly

It has been said that Parliament is part of the birthright of every citizen, the mirror of the people's minds and the guardian of their liberty. We are, each and all of us, the custodians of the dignity of this famous national institution. The role of Parliament is to control the Executive, to create new ideas, to produce original thought, and to pass information on to the electors, so that there is a two-way traffic of ideas between Parliament and the people. It is a means of controlling the raising and spending of public money which is also at the heart of the Parliamentary system, and redressing individual grievances.

All Parliaments differ in their form and practice to suit local conditions, but they have one common view, to make Parliament as effective as possible and to expand and develop its functions to meet the demands of the times (The Parliamentarian July 1972)

One essential quality and strength of any Government is its integrity. There is the saying ... "He who comes to govern must come with clean hands."

Ideally, once a representative is elected by the people he becomes part of government not politics.

Our politicians must not descend to huckstering. They must not abandon their honesty for the sake of partisan expediency. To achieve greatness as a politician the individual should look upon Government as an art and science to be learned, not merely an office to be won.

It is clear that the most important link between government and public opinion is Parliament. It is thus extremely important to understand the functions and procedures of the House. Our system is essentially one of democracy, but of democracy by consent and by delegation. The essence of modern democratic machinery is Cabinet Government: a combination of responsible leadership by the executive and responsible criticism by the Assembly.

If we accept this view it means that the main task of the Assembly is not itself to legislate or govern, but to secure full discussion and ventilation of all matters, legislative or administrative, before giving its approval to Bills or its support to Ministers and the Cabinet. I do not propose to deal with procedures in the House of Assembly, these are already well documented and accessible to all concerned. I however, suggest that Honourable Members heed the advice given by Mr. Speaker when the occasion demands this.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

National Administration

Beneath the political structure we have been considering there is a complex central administrative structure – government departments, and a range of administrative bodies manned by staff

recruited largely 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,) and within this framework – and subject to their direction – career officials are expected to run the administrative machine efficiently.

A key factor in any study of the Dominican bureaucracy must be the relationship between senior public servants in particular and Ministers, both their own departmental Ministers and the whole political machinery of Cabinet. The organization of the Cabinet at once reveals the interpenetration of political and bureaucratic elements.

It is not so much the size of the ministerial establishment as the range and complexity of its tasks which pose the greatest problems for the organization of the Cabinet and the administration as a whole. The main organizational elements have always been departments, each with a range of functions which, however carefully they may be demarcated, must inevitably overlap with those of other departments. There has to be a central organisation to reconcile departmental differences and plan government policy as a whole. The Cabinet is this body, but although it retains its primacy, it is only one of several devices for securing co-ordinated policy and policy-planning.

The creation of government departments has naturally reflected the range of responsibilities which government has progressively assumed.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

The Public Service

The Public Service is concerned with the conduct of the whole range of government activity as they affect the community. They range from policy formulation to carrying out the day-to-day duties of public administration.

To meet this task, the Service must be able to handle the social, economic, scientific and technical problems of our times, in an international setting.

Public Servants are servants of the State, and in this context means, and is represented by, the Government of the day. There may be special cases in which certain functions are conferred by law upon particular numbers of the Public Service. However, in general, the executive powers of Government are exercised by, and on the advice of Ministers of Government, who are in turn answerable to Parliament. The Public Service as such has an institutional responsibility separate from that of the duly constituted Government of the day. The duty of the individual Public Servant

is first and foremost to the Minister who is in charge of the Department concerned. A change of Minister, for whatever reason, does not involve a change of staff.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Political and Private Activities of Public Servants

Public Servants are required to perform loyally the duties assigned to them by the Government of the day, whatever its political persuasion. It is essential that Ministers and the public should have confidence that the personal views of Public Servants do not influence the performance of their official duties, given their role in serving successive governments of different political complexions. The aim of the rules which govern political activities by Public Servants is to allow them, subject to these fundamental principles, the greatest possible freedom to participate in public affairs consistent with their rights and duties as citizens. The rules should therefore be concerned with political activities liable to give public expression to political views rather than with privately held beliefs and opinions.

As a general rule, the political views of Public Servants should not be a matter of official concern. However, no one may be employed in connection with work which is vital to the security of the State if they have been involved in, or associated with, activities threatening national security.

Generally speaking, there are few restrictions on the private activities of Public Servants, provided that they do not bring discredit on the Public Service, and that there is no possibility of conflict with official duties.

It is important that the Public Service should develop greater professionalism among both specialists and administrators with the aim, among other things, of producing a future top management machine, expert in one or more aspects of a department's work and broadened by increasing responsibilities and experience to become fully professional advisers of Ministers and managers of their policies.

The work of a modern government department is now so complex and intricate that a Minister may have to rely upon departmental briefing. The classic task of the Public Servant is to analyse the options and give advice to Ministers.

The Minister/Senior Public Servant relationship is traditionally thought to depend on confidentiality, on Public Service, public reticence and anonymity in contrast to public projection to the Minister.

Of course, I understand that Senior Public Servants are necessarily intimately concerned with the best methods of achieving Government's policy objectives and in some cases, can hardly avoid public identification with these policies.

Impartiality as applied to the Public Service has a rather special connotation: that of the renunciation of partisan political activity, in the sense of working for the achievement of, or continuation in power by a particular political party.

A great deal more can be said, but I am particularly concerned at this time as to how a genuine co-operation between those who make policy decisions and those who carry them out can be achieved. This is necessary if our administration is to be successful. It must be made clear to all concerned how essential the advice of experts eventually become and how necessary the conventions governing the relations of Minister and Public Servants including their technical advisers are.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

We must remember that a Minister's life in Government is comparatively short and they cannot condone inefficiency. The Public Servant on the other hand is like Tennyson's proverbial brook which seems to go on forever. Sometimes the brook becomes contaminated and the flow is reduced to a trickle, owing to a lack of commitment, poor attitudes, jealousies and deterioration of standards. This may cause the Minister to take matters into his own hands for short term benefit, even though this action may and often ends disastrously in the long run.

There may be lazy Ministers and there are lazy Public Servants, there are ambitious Ministers whose chief motive is their own advancement in power, and there are similarly, Public Servants who think more of their own advancement than they do of the people they serve.

There is however, not the smallest doubt that on the whole it is the public good, or the public's image of what it considers to be its good, which has been constantly served by Ministers and Public Servants working in close co-operation. They should at all times remember the satisfaction of serving others is something that remains in our heart always.

Our system of Government rests on some very fragile supports which must be constantly maintained and sometimes reinforced. Unfortunately, over the years we have been battering at the foundations of the pillars of support, and they are presently in a critical state of disrepair.

I have read with great concern in the Local Press some serious criticism of the Dominica Public Service:

I quote:

"We like to think that the almost universal view of Public Servants as malingerers who do just what they are supposed to and no more, with little or no initiative, is just a myth. The trouble is too often, the myth is true. For a variety of reasons, many Public Servants are lulled into complacency by their job security, not to mention the still lingering glamour that goes with the job. Now that Public Servants are working for their very own Government as distinct from our Colonial past, and now that a re-think of their role is necessary, the Ministry responsible for the Public Service must be sure to formulate programmes to develop Public Servants and to bring about in them a national pride which will make them perform better than they now do. And the Civil Service Association must not be divorced from this process." Unquote

The Government has embarked upon a programme of Administrative Reform designed to promote/improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Public Service.

Of particular importance is the component of the Performance Appraisal process primarily designed to identify strengths and weaknesses of employees for the purpose of career development.

As part of its Human Resource Development thrust, In-service Training – local and overseas – is receiving increased attention, the emphasis being on Human and Organizational Development.

The snag is, that the question of attitudes is important and must be addressed. We need to examine our attitudes – attitude to work, the dignity of the person, attitude to the Nation, to leaders, attitude to development, to justice, attitude to things of the Spirit. Are we self-reliant? Do we have faith in ourselves? Do we have national pride? Do we foster love, unity, brotherhood and peace? Our proper attitude is so essential for nation building.

We need to examine ourselves – leaders, public servants and people – and see whether we are psychologically prepared for Independence. We have achieved political independence, but are we truly liberated people? Do we have the heart of a people to make Independence work? The price of nationhood is the development of self-worth.

Independence is a challenge to take our destiny into our own hands. It must be a march into paths of self-determination, self-confidence, national pride and real freedom.

It is for this we must work and hope and pray.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

The ball is in our court to play, and we must therefore play and play to win. And this is the crux of the problem, are we all playing as a team to win? The aim must be to equip our Public Servants with the expertise and attitude to use their abilities so as to become an efficient body of permanent officers, occupying a position duly subordinate to that of the Ministers who are directly responsible

to Parliament, yet possessing sufficient independence, character, ability and experience, to be able to advise and to some extent influence, those who are from time to time over them.

An authority on the Westminster Model of Government has commented, I quote:- "The ideal candidate for appointment to the Administrative class of the Civil Service should possess intellectual ability of a high order, and the ability to discern and analyse the essential of complicated questions, and to express themselves with lucidity in speech writing. They should be able to get on well with all kinds of people, be adaptable, far-sighted and persevering, and have enough strength of character and leadership to hold their own, take decisions and exercise responsibility. They should have enough practical imagination to enable them to devise, in broad outline, workable plans for dealing with an unprecedented situation. Above all, they would need judgement and common sense." Unquote. – A tall order indeed, but we must try to maintain these standards as best as we can.

It is our duty to develop leadership ability in the Service, but it must be channelled in the proper direction. Today's leaders are creating tomorrow's world. And they are now in training. To some degree each of us has a responsibility to lead today and to train tomorrow's leaders. Never lose sight of the fact that each of us has a tremendous influence on one another.

Conclusion

The smooth working of our system of Government evidently depends upon the existence of mutual respect and confidence between the political boss and the Public Servant. Actually, this depends very much upon the personalities and attitudes, of the people concerned. The system works best when Minister and Permanent Secretary, in particular, are both strong, good-tempered people, when each is active, but recognizes clearly the province of the other.

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Permanent officials tend to follow precedent, and indeed, the force of precedent furnishes the basis of their power, but the tendency to be too rigid in their rules is the curse of all their tribe. This often gives rise to complaints, and the political chief has to insist upon the need of making exceptions in hard cases without allowing the hard cases themselves to make bad law. You can't run a government solely on a business basis. Government should be human. It should have a heart.

Somebody must be held responsible to Parliament and the Public. The person has to be the Minister, for it is he, and neither Parliament nor the public who has control over his Public Servants. One of the fundamentals of our system of Government is that a Minister is responsible to Parliament, and through Parliament to the public, for every act of the Executive. This Mr. Speaker, and Honourable Members is the cornerstone of our system of parliamentary government.

I have just touched the tip of the iceberg. Our public Administration desperately needs competent leaders and managers at all levels, and is waiting on strong men and women of principle, people with commitment, people with good attitudes, honest individuals, and people who are interested in working for high standards, who will stand as a rock on which to rebuild our Public Administration.

"Honourable Members are no doubt familiar with Shakespeare's tragic play "Julius Caesar". The play demonstrates admirably the jealousies, greed, hate and treachery which sometimes takes possession of ambitious public officials, which on occasions may even lead to murder". The following quotation is to my mind applicable in the context of my Message:

"Men at some time are masters of their fates;

The fault dear Brutus is not in our stars;

But in ourselves, that we are underlings."

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Government business is too critical to be taken for granted. Too much depends on it.

To prosper, a State must be built on foundations of moral character; and this character is the principle element of its strength and the only guarantee of its permanence and prosperity. (J. Currie).

Let our object be our Country, our whole Country, and nothing but our Country. And by the blessing of the Almighty, may our Country itself be a splendid movement, not of oppression and terror, but one of wisdom, of peace, and of liberty, upon which the world may gaze with admiration forever. (Daniel Webster)

Our charge is to prepare and guide this Country into the twenty-first century. It is a difficult undertaking but an honourable one.

May the Almighty guide and bless you, and may He bless our Nation.