



ADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT

In Search of Excellence in the Public Service

BY

HIS EXCELLENCY SIR CLARENCE SEIGNORET, OBE

President of the Commonwealth of Dominica

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

OPENING OF THE FIRST MEETING

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Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members of the House of Assembly

Introduction

I am grateful for the opportunity to address this Honourable House, and I decided to speak on a subject which needs urgent and serious consideration.

The topic – "In Search of Excellence in the Public Service".

Bureaucracy in the Public Service

We sometimes speak glibly of bureaucracy in the Public Service, but I asked you not to be misled by these utterances, for the very simple reason that Civil Servants are required to function within the law and more often than not, they must consult with two or more persons before action can be taken. A Civil Servant cannot afford to make too many errors for obvious reasons. Also, we must recognize that true bureaucracy is something much more serious than the normal run of accusations imply.

Something About Government

Please permit me to say something about Government as an introduction to my Message.

The state is a community of people whose membership requires them to live under the same code of behaviour. To make this possible they choose the kind and quality of Government that best serves their needs "today" and gives them hope for "tomorrow".

We should not regard the state as a sort of overlord, but a creature of our own hands, - a servant. The government of the state is placed in the hands of men and women believed by citizens to be capable of discharging the duties of care, foresight and protection. The best form of government, they agree, is government by good men, qualified to carry out these obligations.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Democracy a Difficult System

Democracy is not an easy system to maintain and develop. It must bring together under one roof two different ideas; the idea that the state should provide scope and opportunity for individual enterprise and the idea, and the idea that the state should be a collection of public services, satisfying people's needs. However to be effective the government must have aims that are specific, concrete and definite.

One essential quality in good government is integrity. The strength of any government lies in the belief of the people it serves that it is inflexibly open and truthful.

Ideally, once a representative is elected by the people he becomes part of the government, and not 'politics'. The purpose of a political party is to bring together people who share certain beliefs and ideas so that they may carry their principles into practice. When a member is elected to Parliament it is his duty to form his opinion after hearing all sides in a debate, and to lend his influence towards governing in the interest of all the people.

In a democratic State the men forming the government are concerned with representing the citizens. They believe in the sovereignty of people, universal suffrage in which every man and woman counts as a person, and the right of the majority to rule, and to protect 'fundamental rights and freedom'.

The Government in Action

Standing at the apex of the Westminster model of Governmental executive power, is the Prime Minister surrounded by the members of Cabinet. Each member is responsible for the administration of a department of government staffed by Civil Servants, presided over by the Permanent Secretary.

The basic qualities of the Cabinet are secrecy, unity of outlook, collective responsibility, and accountability to Parliament. The outstanding duty of Cabinet is to furnish initiative and leadership, to provide a national policy, to cope with emergencies, and to plan for future needs. The confidence of the people is won by a Cabinet which displays these qualities objectively and consistently.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Machinery of Government

Today the purpose of public administration has been completely oriented. Its functions have enormously increased in numbers, variety and complexity and its methodology has grown from the trial and error stage, into an orderly discipline with an organized ever increasing body of knowledge and experience.

This increase in the variety, number 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 them out. To meet even a part of its growing responsibilities the State must develop the administrative capacity to implement its programmes of economic and social progress. Public administration

therefore is the machinery used by the service state to place itself in a position to make plans and programmes that can be carried out, and to carry out the plans and programmes it has made.

To an ever-increasing degree, the effective utilization of natural resources depend upon the adoption of sound economic and social programmes, whose success in turn depends upon an effective public service. But the greatest single obstacle to progress is the shortage of trained men and women willing and able to fill the many new posts created by an expanding economy. Sometimes the salary levels have indirectly led to double employment and consequent conflict of interest. Discipline, integrity, courtesy and morale do not develop, and the prestige of the Service consequently remains low.

Despite these handicaps, the Government is confronted with ever-rising expectations which not even the most advanced nations could fulfil. In the enthusiasm of a new nationalism, a citizenry unacquainted with the difficulties involved, expects Government to work miracles. Demands of basic utilities such as an adequate water supply, roads, electricity, schools, hospitals, agricultural development and for the establishment of new industrial, commercial and financial enterprises – these swamp the Ministries. The State is expected to conjure up, virtually overnight, a variety of facilities which in developed countries have evolved gradually through private and local initiative over generations.

However, a State, whatever its form has three constituent elements – the citizen, the political leaders and the officials, but the citizens, in most cases are the least well organized. 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.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

The Civil Service - Its Importance

The Civil Service is the most important part of the machinery of government and without a well trained and honest Service, efficient government is impossible. It is upon this Service that we depend to see that Government's policies are realized.

The interests of the private citizens are affected to a great extent by the actions of Civil Servants. Initiative, responsiveness, and friendly human relations are needed. The citizen has a right to expect that his affairs will be dealt with effectively and expeditiously, and also that his personal feelings will be sympathetically and fairly considered. The Civil Service must be conscious of the public's dislike for some manipulations of bureaucracy. It is true that whether we live under the most liberal of democracies or the most totalitarian of despotism, we are being served by appointed officials. Frequently they are charged with formulating rules that govern the execution of the

details of broad legislation enacted by Parliament. It is imperative therefore, that they carry out their duties in an imaginative yet humane manner.

In order to do so, Civil Servants must be people of 'character'. Many things are mass-produced, but we cannot do so with character, because that is a matter of personal identity. It belongs to those who have found the part they are to play; who are doing the work for which they are best endowed; who are satisfied that they are filling a vital need; who are meeting their obligations and standing up to their task. 'Character consists for doing what you have to do, when you have to it, even when you don't want to do it'.

Such people willingly learn whatever they need to know to perform their roll; they discipline their passing impulses so as to keep them from getting the way of proper performance, and they do their job better than is needed just to 'get by'. Character is a positive thing. It is not protected innocence, but practiced virtue; it is not fear of vice, but love of excellence.

Craftsmanship

There are sound standards of craftsmanship in every calling – artists have to meet them, as do carpenters, lawyers, stenographers, operators of bulldozers, surgeons, business managers and so on. Every honest calling, every walk of life, has its own elite, its own aristocracy based upon excellence of performance.

The Civil Servants of quality will take delight in craftsmanship – irrespective of grades. He is impelled by his principles to do well habitually what it is his job to do. That means patient thoroughness. It does mean that there is attention to details, fundamental integrity in the work, and evidence that the workman knew what he was doing and carefully brought his skill to bear on the task.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Efficiency and Discipline - Major Ingredients

We have seen that the State is compelled to participate in a varied field of activity and an efficient Civil Service trained in the specialist task of carrying out the broad decisions of Government is a necessity, if Government is to fulfil the functions the public expects of it.

Efficiency is the magic ingredient which transmits vague wavering capabilities into certain performance. It means knowing the job, organizing the work and carrying it out effectively and with enthusiasm.

One broad avenue of the pursuit of this "Elusive Butterfly of Excellence" seems to be along the broad highway of training. But so much depends on personal qualities temperament and character.

The case for training in the Public Service was highlighted in the Pusinelli/Liverpool Report on the Review of the Structure, Salaries and Conditions of Service in the Dominica Public Service, dated April, 1970. The Report stresses the need for greater expertise and astuteness among Permanent Secretaries, among the professional and other officers in the Service, and for the functions of the Head of Civil Service to be defined clearly. Also the need for enlightened and responsible Staff Associations, recognized and encouraged by government are desirable. Associations in which officials may band together to work in defense of their rights and in pursuit of greater efficiency, and indeed of high professional and ethical standards.

The need for increased opportunities of training to be provided is stressed, in order to prepare staff for their increased responsibilities in the context of Internal Self-Government. The Report goes on to refer to the poor customer service the general slackness and lack of discipline in the public service, and the necessity for those in authority to, at every level, to take constructive decisions to eradicate the inefficient. These observations are just as relevant today, and even more so since achieving Independence, for we are now completely on our own.

Suitable training in public administration can indeed achieve a great deal, even some of the tricks in management of people – but they cannot teach an administrator how to get on with his staff, so that he combines their loyalty with their efficiency. This he must learn in practice, if indeed his temperament permits it. And it is quite beyond them to instill the sense of integrity, without which Government cannot acquire a good image or goodwill, and without which it cannot survive. The social atmosphere or culture of the organization has so much to do with efficiency.

A most important ingredient of a Public Servant is discipline. The Public Servant needs to know about discipline human beings simply cannot relate to other people without it. For this reason there must be an approved set of rules and regulations for the proper conduct and the effective and efficient running of the Service. On the other hand, it follows, that these regulations must be widely distributed, universally known and impartially administered.

The fact that the politician is as changeable as the climate while the Civil Servants, like Tennyson's "Brook", does on forever, is simply a product of practice or convention. Public officers must be aware that they may render themselves liable to disciplinary action under the regulations of the appropriate Service Commission in respect of breaches of the regulations.

The Senior Official

Governments over the world are wrestling with these problems, and it may not have any universal solution. One point on which most observers agree however, is the crucial position of the senior official, whether in maintaining good human relations, or assessing the high level of productivity. The system of selection and promotion must be such that people who have the right qualities of leadership in the public service are spotted quickly and given training adequate for their important role.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Relationship Between Ministers and Civil Servants

The relationship between Ministers and Civil Servants must not be overlooked. I am unable to go into the many intricacies this morning, but suffice it to say that determination of policy is the function of the Minister, and once a policy is determined it is the unquestioned and unquestionable business of the Civil Servant to strive to carry out that policy with precisely the same goodwill and enthusiasm whether he agrees with it or not. The part which a good Civil Servant can play in policy-making must of necessity depend on the personality of the Minister.

In addition, great care must be exercised by all concerned to emphasize and to preserve the political neutrality of the Civil Service, and to make it quite clear that no Civil Servant, although he serves faithfully the party in power, is a political adherent of any party. Political neutrality means more than mere absence of political activity or bias on the part of individual career officials; it means that career officials will always respect to the will of succeeding Governments.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Ideals of the Civil Service

The needed for Civil Servants, devoted, fearless, impartial, expert, highly trained, owing their full allegiance to the elected Government in power for the time being, and ready to give equally effective service to any other Government which may be duly and properly elected in the future, proud of their loyalty, not any party or faction, but to all the people of the Country they serve, must be emphasized.

This is a conception and ideal which demands the fullest dedication and highest patriotism.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Excellence a Demanding Taskmaster

Excellence is a demanding taskmaster. But when skilled professionals and their devoted helpers work together to meet its challenges remarkable ingenuity, determination and mutual achievement finally prevail. Together they all provide an exceptional ability to accomplish the goals people set for themselves.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members of the House of Assembly,

I humbly pray that the Holy Spirit will enlighten and guide your deliberations, and that you may have a successful and fruitful session of Parliament.