

SYNTHESIS OF THE DISCUSSION AT THE CONFERENCE

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1. *The Social and Economic Framework*

Public administrations exist in a given social and economic context. It seems to me a very difficult task to reduce their extraordinary complexity in order to briefly describe their most outstanding traits.

Now more than ever it would be a foolish endeavour to attempt to portray in a single coherent and significant picture all the richly heterogeneous tissue of relations and structures characteristic of our times. What I can do on this occasion is to try to recall, with the best wish of acting as a faithful notary of your discussion, such traits of that social framework which, in your opinion, are the most important and significant.

Even so, there is still a risk of making mistakes, because of my own limitations obviously, but also because in the schematic syntheses presented by all who discussed these topics there were perhaps some over-simplifications and clichés, subjective images of reality, and in all certainty, rough outlines that ignore nuances, fine shadings, profiles and concrete details.

In my opinion, and according to your testimony, the social framework of our age is characterized by a great concern about problems having to do with excessive population growth —or zero population growth— and exhaustion of raw material. Fortunately, in our society the information explosion and the higher standard of education has brought about a rising level of demand on the part of increasingly larger sectors of the population that request goods and services from public agencies. These demands are particularly significant on the part of user and consumer groups.

Our age is one of continuous, accelerating change such as our elders could never have envisioned —a change often attributed to a spectacular scientific and technological development, which unfortunately, has served only to benefit a very small part of the international community.

Our world still permits too many inequalities in the distribution of wealth, both internally and internationally, due to the existence of dominant economies and in view of the exaggerated influence of multinational organizations. It has not been able to replace the imperiled developmental system —whose faith that growth equals development is no longer tenable. On the contrary, what is now obvious is that experiences cannot be repeated, that the advance of the few still coincides with the stagnation or backwardness of many others, and the low productivity of many of the earth's nations force one to take a pessimistic view of the future, at least as long as in the present we continue to witness marginalization of persons and groups, painful discrimination, selfishness and lack of solidarity.

Not a day goes by without bringing forth new evidence of the growing role of administration, due to social dynamics and also because of the justified expectations given rise to by spectacular developments and achievements which rarely affected more than one sector and which in case attained the necessary global perspective. The play of these circumstances has *profoundly eroded the prestige of public administration*, contested today by all social strata in terms unknown heretofore.

And all this is oddly compatible with the continued expansion of its presence in social events, by means of very different formulas which range from the traditional exercise of power to negotiation and agreements with social groups to which the implementation of collective tasks is entrusted.

In spite of all this, the answer of public power to the unanimous world clamor for authentic participation has been weak, if not altogether nonexistent.

The failure of administration can be clearly seen in its inability to translate the brilliant programs developed by experts with such ease into true satisfaction of social needs. Bearing witness to this statement are the deficiencies of housing, health and education in so many countries, the anarchy of urban development and marginal populations and the, as yet, unsolved problems of poverty and ignorance.

Our society has not known how to control the impact of technological and industrial development on the ecological balance and we are destroying nature, while the appeals of those who believe in the urgent need to *defend the environment* and the *quality of life* fall on the deaf ears of selfishness or promises of a technical paradise.

For some countries the basic issue is to ensure for today's children an assured road to health, education and professional work. For many others the extraordinary increase of life expectancy forces them to restructure their thinking on a policy of special care and attention for what is now being called the "third age".

The education explosion has shaken the foundations of educational institutions, particularly of universities, which are often the loudspeaker for voices of inconformity with the social and political system. There is a crisis of teachers, massification has taken over, resources are inadequate and universities are still in many countries an elite school for a privileged class.

The picture is definitely a sombre one and would justify fear and despair; were not hope our obligation. However, such

is our society. This, or one very like it, is the playing field on which the combat will be fought. And the first prerequisite in a successful approach to do battle is to be perfectly familiar with the terrain and the might of the adversary.

Public administration was invented by men a long time ago to lead our societies to more advanced stages of progress and well-being. There is no other tool at our disposal and therefore the second part of this synthesis will be devoted to a revision of its state of health, drawn from your judgements and comments.

2. *Public Administration*

a) *A Generalized Insatisfaction*

After all the above it will strike no one as odd that a summary of your opinions seems to manifest a generalized dissatisfaction. This conclusion can also be derived from a brief examination of some basic aspects referred to again and again in the working documents and discussions.

b) *Administrative Structures*

At the central level these structures have grown irrationally, with total anarchy, in observance of a foolish Parkinson's Law, when not out of a clear politization. Central structures are stagnant pools, with poor communications among them. The system suffers from excessive fragmentation, dispersion of responsibilities and poor coordination. On the other hand, there is frequent overlapping of jurisdictions and gaps of authority —both conflict and absence of action. And the central administration reacts slowly and late to the challenge of new needs.

Local structures are clearly inadequate to rationally administer great conglomerations or to improve the well-being of small communities abandoned by their inhabitants.

Autonomous or decentralized administrations are multiplying excessively and sometimes involve grievous infringements of the rights and duties of political power to plan and direct the overall processes of the public sector. Their legal, financial and budgetary base is not yet perfect and instead of expediting the operations of the large bureaucratic organisations, relieving them of some of their tasks, they grow until they too become that kind of organization with the same failings.

c) *Decision Making Systems*

These are based on routine and tradition. Policies are developed without gathering the necessary information, without planning, without first establishing objectives and without a thorough study of priorities, and are thus converted, if at all, into vague or unfeasible programs. Administrative procedures are slow and excessively formal, with an excess of red tape. Too much emphasis is placed on accessory and superficial aspects, thus removing the administration even further from that reality which is supposedly trying to change. There is not enough delegation and there are too many checks and balances. There is too much centralization and not enough faith in the ability of local or second echelon agencies, and the entire system suffers when, from time to time, a bottleneck at some point makes inner collapse or external chaos a real threat.

d) *Law*

Our administrations are lawful organizations, with the law as their frame of reference and the observance of legal norms as their ultimate justification. But, on the other hand, there are too many norms, many of which are merely written formulas in the Official Journal and contribute nothing to a renewal of society.

Moreover, perhaps due to needs we believe to be even more pressing, we are still living basically within a legal order belonging to the past. Its obsolescence is so obvious that the administration leaves legal norms to one side and tries to solve its problems without reference to juridical formulas. It is true

that some jurists and administrators have made praiseworthy efforts to find new ways, for example, Acts that are a general frame of reference, experimental laws or certain provisions negotiated with some groups of society; however, the general rule is still that the law— the expression of the people's will, the point at which opposing interests come into balance, the synthesis of citizens' guarantees and obligatory efficacy of public power — too often becomes a hindrance, a millstone around the neck of social progress. On the one hand, there are too many useless provisions, while on the other, legislation is inadequate to institutionalize public functions or to define the competence of the various public sector organs or to deal with the vital matter of new ownership, the new corporation order, or to provide an appropriate base for integrations trends.

e) *Personnel*

i) *Recruitment*

In some countries the recruiting system and the structure itself of Civil Service is such that top level officers are almost always people from the higher economic and social strata. These high officials bring to administration and elitist, minority oriented concept, far removed from social reality, and they have little understanding of the citizen mass. There is therefore a ruling group which may tend towards paternalistic and authoritarian patterns of behavior. If we add to this the traditionally legal background of many officials, the potentially serious consequences of such a situation are even clearer.

On the other hand, in other countries recruiting is done solely on a political basis, which may result in greater loyalty and sense of belonging, and also the eradication of red tape, but it can also lead to a lack of the desirable professional level which can only be secured by selecting personnel on the basis of personal merit and professional competence.

ii) *Insufficient Commitment*

For a number of reasons — insecurity, inadequate compensa-

tion, lack of incentives, poor distribution of work, scarce attention to vocation, poorer conditions than in the private sector, lack of responsibility, insufficient information, no participation, etc. — official are often unmotivated. Public service is too often the refuge for persons who place their personal security above all else. There is a schism with political power and when faced with any new project of change and transformations, officials oppose the barrier of an assumed neutrality, which is actually nothing but a lack of commitment and the manifestation of their desire to give the people only as much time as it is strictly necessary to earn their salary — which they believe inadequate, while their true interests are far from public service and devoted to the exercise of their professional activity.

Fortunately a mystique of Civil Service still exists in some, and their generous sacrifice makes it possible for the machinery to continue operating. But these good officials can also become discouraged because they realize the many failings of the system, or because they feel helpless in the face of the inadequacy of human and material resources for public service to discharge its many responsibilities.

f) Attempts at an Administrative Reform

This is something so obviously real that there are continuous attempts made to carry out an administrative reform. Sometimes these attempts are made by local technicians and sometimes by foreign specialists working on the basis of a bilateral cooperation agreement or as part of international agencies.

Such reforms have had serious defects that have made them ineffective. And when they have not been theoretical “ivory tower” constructs, with no participation of officials and administrators, they have been premised on erroneous dimensions or mistakenly implemented. When they have not been overambitious and the product of virtually unattainable political promises, they have been content with temporary, isolated and disconnected minor precedural changes, even though a complete transformation can only be achieved with time and a sustained effort.

Above all, such administrative reforms have been almost exclusively directed to an improvement of the machinery as such and of streamlining of administrative process, while totally neglecting the true function of administration, that is, its condition as a means towards the end of "collective well-being".

3. *The New International Economic Order*

As a result of the interaction of all the above phenomena, and also because of the failure of certain attempts to solve these situations appropriately at an international level, the world wide situation has become worse, and increasingly deteriorated in the last few years. The ambitious attempts of two decades of development were frustrated and precipitated the awareness of the less favoured countries, which saw with greater clarity the failing of the economic system in all its depth. It was these countries, and not the specialists from New York headquarters, that joined efforts to make their unanimous voice heard at the General Assembly, saying that the United Nations should take a firm, decisive step to clarify the situation and adopt measures to change it.

1974 was a crucial year and on May 9, the General Assembly approved Resolution 3201 in which the principles of what was already beginning to be called "the new international economic order" were decisively set forth.

A few days later, on May 16, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 3203 which goes much farther than the previous one, both because of its actual extension and because, in addition to a lucid statement of the problem, it announces the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States, as well as the approval of a special program of emergency measures to mitigate the "difficulties of the developing countries more grievously affected by the economic crisis".

Thanks to the praiseworthy initiative of the Mexican government this doctrine embodied in the Charter of Economic

Rights and Duties of States was approved on December 12, 1974. It is already, and will be more so in the future, the foundation on which the fair and solidary edifice of new social and economic relations will be built.

This is the situation. It does not mean that public administration faces new or different responsibilities because of the Charter — as many of those described have existed for a long time — but rather that by virtue of the Charter, countries accept before the world the moral commitment of trying to remedy all these deficiencies, and that every right has its counterpart in a duty that will be more pressingly demanded day by day. Thus, in this age of confusion, the Charter provides a certain guideline for Governments to follow in the road they must take.