

# THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CIVIL SERVICE IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT\*

by Luang Sukhum Nayapradit

*Mr. President, Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies, Honored Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:*

I am greatly honored to be invited to speak to such a distinguished company. The privilege of being a guest speaker before this group of eminent public administrators is one I treasure highly for I believe these meetings contribute significantly to the advancement of our profession.

Since the theme of this conference is Personnel Management and Administration and since I have been closely associated with the civil service almost all my life, it is only natural that the subject on which I wish to speak to you today should be one very close to my heart—it is the importance of the civil service in national development.

The civil service, of course, must be considered within the larger context of public administration. I have noted with considerable satisfaction the increasing attention which has been given in world forums to the subject of public administration during the past few years. I really believe that at long last, the true importance of public administration is beginning to be appreciated at the highest levels.

Particularly gratifying is the general consensus of economic experts that good public administration is one of the basic requirements for economic development. The U.S. Ambassador to India, Professor John Kenneth Galbraith, an authority on the subject of economic development, has repeatedly stressed the need for good public administration in the early stages of the economic development process. In a speech at the University of Madras in India last year, he put it rather strongly; he said, "The first task is not to get capital or technicians but, where these are lacking, to build competent organs of public administration."

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If good public administration is essential to the process of economic development, no aspect of this field is as fundamental as the competence of the civil service. For without competent, informed and dedicated personnel, no government can hope to embark successfully on a program of large-scale development and improvement. Indeed, the history of many countries would indicate that successful economic growth is generally conditioned by preceding or simultaneous development of an improved civil service system.

Even the initiation of an economic development program, though its conception may be the work of political leaders assisted by various experts, is largely dependent on the assistance of a competent civil service. Basic data concerning economic resources and activities have to be collected and processed by statisticians. The financial implications must be evaluated in relation to national income and expenditures. Plans for land reform involve the administration of the public domain. The civil service is intimately associated with practically every phase of economic development. And, apart from its contribution to the basic data on which any economic plan must rest, an intelligent civil service will inevitably have a considerable share in policy determination as well. Thus it can be easily understood that although the civil service is only one of the resources which must be employed to achieve economic development, it is a most vital element of the process.

Therefore, it is obvious that the success of a national development program depends very much on the effectiveness of the civil service. And the effectiveness of the civil service depends, in turn, on good administration of public personnel.

If we understand the importance of our role in the development of our country, we in the field of the civil service must be equally aware of the gigantic responsibilities which are ours. National economic success or failure may well result from our efforts—or lack of them. Our fellow countrymen may be condemned to additional years of poverty, poor health and ignorance if we are incompetent and indifferent. We cannot afford to give less than our utmost.

This conference will consider a number of important and interesting questions in the field of personnel. I should like to suggest some problems in the area of civil service reform and public personnel administration to which I hope the Conference will address itself during the next few days. It is my opinion that the solution of these problems is fundamental to the development and maintenance of an effective civil service.

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One of the great problems faced by the civil service of an economically developing country is the identification of trained personnel and their utilization in those areas in which their abilities will have maximum impact on the national program. We must make the best use of the people we have. The human resources of a country, in terms of education, training, skills, numbers, mobility, income and expenditures will be a major determinant of economic development and self-sustaining growth. It is of the utmost importance to determine our manpower needs, facilitate the training of personnel to meet those needs and assure their continuing employment at their highest skill. The problem of mobilizing the manpower resources of a nation is, to be sure, not solely a civil service problem. It involves action along a much broader front. Nevertheless, in those countries where the Government is far and away the largest employer, the civil service must assume a major role in the task.

Another problem that is as great as, or even greater than, the others is the problem of change. All of us here are aware of the difficulties which face any attempt to introduce in a legal form the concept of a civil service based on the merit system. We in Thailand have probably been more fortunate in this respect than many other countries since our first civil service law was put into effect during the old days of the absolute monarchy, by the king himself. The first civil service law, of course, did not create much of a merit system as we normally think of it today. It was, however, an introduction to the concept of the more modern civil service system which followed. Of course, we all know that the passage of a law does not automatically mean that the law will be effective. To make a law effective requires a great deal of work; the law must be implemented by an active organization, by personnel, by policies, methods and procedures; by office space, by desks, by paper clips; in short, a living administrative organism must be created.

And, even if the difficult step of putting the civil service law successfully into effect is accomplished, a still greater problem has to be solved, i.e. the problem of how to change human behavior to conform to the changing environment and conditions created by the law. This, ladies and gentlemen, is probably the hardest thing of all to accomplish. We are trying to change the customs and habits of centuries in just a few years. Resistance to change is a human characteristic and the higher in society we go, the more resistance we can expect. There is an old Thai saying that an old tree is difficult to bend. Those at the top will naturally resist change which might threaten their authority and prerogatives.

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The same observations can be made in the field of civil service. Unfortunately, for most of us, the ideal of an incorruptible public service remains a distant goal. It is likely to remain so as long as civil servants are inadequately paid for the duties and responsibilities they perform. However, I am of the opinion that integrity, like morale, is not solely dependent on salary. The most highly paid public servant are not necessarily the most honest public servants. I believe we have made insufficient use of other alternative solutions; it is too easy to blame all our problems on low pay. Corruption in the public service must be fought in all its forms. A civil service respected for its integrity and efficiency is not only a keystone of economic development, it will also more readily elicit public cooperation at home and abroad.

Some of the other problems in the civil service area which we are particularly faced with, it seems to me, are:

- selecting the best qualified for appointment and promotion
- providing adequate training facilities, either at home or abroad, to insure an adequate supply of personnel.
- maintaining a flexibility in our administrative processes which will enable us to provide needed personnel service quickly.
- reducing the overstaffing which characterises so many of our agencies.
- adjusting personnel programs to the needs of economic and social development plan.
- and one more which I suspect applies to other countries as well as to my own.

In Thai, we have a saying . . .

“ทำงานผิดมาก ทำน้อยผิดน้อย ไม่ทำอะไรไม่ผิดเลย”

which means the more you work, the more mistakes you make; the less you work, the fewer mistakes you make; if you don't work at all, you make no mistakes.

So why work ?

A sober appraisal of our civil service problems will certainly lead us to the conclusion that much still remains to be done. But I do not think that any of us need feel discouraged if he is conscientiously trying to solve the questions which face him. All obstacles must eventually be overcome by persistence and sincerity.

Our great enemy is time. Time is catching up with us, ladies and gentlemen. What was good enough 30 years ago, or even 10 years ago, is not good enough today. The complexity

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of our lives increases at an accelerated tempo. We must measure up to our responsibilities if our countries are to share fully in the benefits of modern technology and economic development. We cannot guarantee that a good civil service will bring success in economic development, but there is ample evidence to indicate that successful economic development cannot be attained without a good civil service.

And in working toward our objective of a national civil service of ability and integrity, we can take pride and satisfaction in the knowledge that our efforts are helping our fellow men achieve those moral, intellectual and material benefits which have been sought for centuries and which today seem finally to be within reach.

Thank you very much.

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### Work

Happiness, I have discovered, is nearly always a rebound from hard work.

*David Grayson*

It's no credit to anyone to work too hard.

*E.W. Howe*

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