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BASES FOR AN ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM

by

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The present study will first look for answers to the following questions: (1) What is administrative reform? (2) Why is reform necessary? (3) What is the aim of reform? (4) How is the reform to take place? and then consider whether the time is ripe for Mexico to undertake a thorough administrative reform.

1. What is administrative reform?

Administrative reform is a change in the structures, organization, systems and attitudes prevailing in the public administration of a country at a given point in time.

It is common knowledge that all changes provoke resistance, sometimes clear opposition, either because the changes go against habits, customs and vested interests or because they have to contend with simple inertia. Every individual has his own particular way of doing things, his own approach and his own conception of his task, and it takes some effort to agree that there is more than one way of doing the same task.

Reforming any administrative unit, office, section, department or ministry always poses serious problems; but it is especially complicated if the reform is designed to cover the entire administrative apparatus of government, both the traditional units - ministries or departments - and the complex world of the decentralized agencies and enterprises which together make up what is called the public sector. In this respect, a distinction must be made between reorganizing, as it is usually termed, one or two administrative units, and undertaking a thorough reform of the administration.

Reorganization brings changes in procedures and individuals but rarely touches structures. It is what the bureaucrats call a 'patch-up job'. Almost always such reorganizations are carried out in a hurry and in an unpleasant atmosphere of fear on the part of the employees that they will lose their posts.

In most cases, reorganization is supposed to save money and increase efficiency, without much thought for the consequences, and it is not uncommon for it to yield what seem to be spectacular results quite quickly.

/Reorganization virtually

Reorganization virtually always coincides with the entry of a new and dynamic chief who wishes to show how efficient he is by changing everything, in the belief that this will impress his superiors.

Thorough administrative reform is something quite different. It has to be based on a careful study of the existing situation that is as comprehensive as possible and examines the reasons why the organization is outmoded or defective - or in other words, why it is in chaos. Attempting to reorganize chaos is quite pointless; what is needed is to organize everything from the ground up, as if nothing had ever existed.

This is why genuine reform must be preceded by scientifically organized research work to provide a proper diagnosis of the existing situation, and in this respect administrative techniques have made a great deal of progress.

The diagnosis must also include an analysis of the objectives of the public sector, which can be found in the legislation establishing or regulating its various activities.

Under the rule of law prevailing in modern States, these objectives are outlined in the Constitution and in its regulatory legislation. For the most part, Constitutions express very far-reaching aims that are described in detail in the relevant legislation. Under presidential systems of government, the powers granted to the executive branch by the Constitution are so sweeping that they can feasibly encompass the boldest and most ambitious of administrative reforms.

Administrative reform cannot be a series of random actions and decisions; it must be a combination of interrelated steps following a plan, no matter how long the plan will take to complete in its entirety. It is essential for an over-all view to be taken, and this is why the reform must be all-embracing, i.e. must cover all the components of the organization within its sphere of competence in order to be able to see what effect it will have on each of them, even though it may modify only one or two of them.

## 2. Why is reform necessary?

It would be absurd to undertake a comprehensive reform of the administration simply to satisfy personal whims, or to be in the fashion, or just for the sake of reform. Although administrative reform admittedly consists of a set of operations and processes that are implemented over time and take several many years to complete, it would be naive to think that substantial changes have to be made in the administration all the time. Far from improving matters, this might well lead to the interruption or misdirection of services, and in most cases would be self-defeating.

Because of its nature, the public administration needs some degree of stability to enable employees and officials to acquire the necessary capability to fulfil their functions in a fully informed and efficient manner. And this stability is jeopardized by all those earnest reformers who keep the staff permanently on edge because of the boldness of their ideas and sometimes also in a very laudable attempt to implant permanent improvements.

The fact that heads of State evince some reluctance to embark on sweeping reforms of the public administration is due not to lack of interest but probably to a justifiable sense of responsibility in not wishing to risk endangering the normal progress of the public affairs in their charge. This is particularly true in the actively developing countries, where terms of office are too short to cover even the most essential programmes for economic and social development urgently needed by the population.

Nevertheless, matters occasionally reach such a pitch that administrative reform becomes a pressing need, because the dynamic forces of society are calling out for reform owing to the imbalance between the level of development of their own activities and the progress of a public administration that is often slow, antiquated and out of touch with reality.

All this finds its expression in the normal media of public opinion such as the Press, radio and television and also through discussions of such problems in the academic world - in universities, institutes and academies - and at seminars like the present seminar at which the existence of a genuine need for transformation, for change, for reform, is being analysed.

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3. What is the aim of reform?

The first aim of an administrative reform is to develop a clear definition of the objectives of the administration, and then, once this is done, to examine what means the existing organization has at its disposal to achieve these objectives. If the means are not adequate, thought then has to be given to new forms of organization to replace them. This part of the process usually takes some time to complete and this is why it is virtually impossible to lay down a strict timetable for replacing inadequate structures.

The most important part of the reform is still to come, namely the evaluation of the capability of the staff available and, if necessary, the organization of suitable training programmes, either prior to entry or in service. When all is said and done, it is individuals who bring about change, and it is the human element that has to decide what the final results are to be.

With respect to the human element, special reference must be made to a point that has already been raised in the present seminar, namely the attitude of staff to the reform and, in general, their personal conception of what the public administration is, what role they play in it, and what importance their own work has within the whole.

Before any reform can be implemented, it is essential for all those who have some part to play in it to be thoroughly aware of the aims of the reform and to be in agreement with them.

Most attempts to improve the existing state of things fail mainly because of lack of co-operation, and at times because of lack of understanding or absolute opposition to all that involves innovation and change. All reforms are born in people's minds; mankind's great progressive movements are based on persuasion, conviction and adherence to a cause. All this means that a mystique of administrative reform has to be created within the administration to motivate and generate efforts directed towards the lofty aim of providing people with more and better public services.

Another aim of reform is to simplify and streamline tasks, in order to make government activities more flexible, more rapid and more expeditious.

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In brief, administrative reform aims at making the administrative side of government harmonious and unified, so that the same principles inspire all its activities in the different fields in which it operates, and so that it aspires to the highest levels of honesty and integrity.

It has already been said here that techniques alone are not enough for administration; it is also essential to maintain administrative honesty and integrity at a high level.

4. How is the administrative reform to take place?

There are a number of different views on this point. One is that the reform should be implemented by a specific organ of the existing administration, either an agency, a department or a Ministry. Another is that it should be implemented by an independent commission led by a board composed of properly qualified persons of high standing and integrity. Yet another is that administrative reform can only be implemented by the highest governmental authority, either the President of the Republic, the chairman of the Council of Ministers, or a specially appointed minister without portfolio.

Experience in presidential systems of government has shown that unless the President is involved in leading it, the reform will never be a tangible reality. This does not mean, however, that the President in person has to manage the reform directly, but rather that the office of the President must take the initiative and bring all the weight of its indisputable authority to bear in a cause which will have to motivate and fire the enthusiasm of all those co-operating in it, from ministers right down to the lowliest worker. Basically, only a supreme combination of conviction, authority and decision-making will break down resistance within the administration and inspire confidence among the citizenry. Only there is a genuine and deep-rooted movement of public opinion will a serious and large-scale reform be successful.

It is common knowledge, and public opinion never tires of repeating it, that the bureaucracy has many faults and bad habits in Mexico and in every country. It would be naive to think that these faults will disappear as if by magic simply because a decree is adopted. Many of them are so

/deeply rooted

deeply rooted that it is hard to imagine an administrative reform alone being able to do away with them. It will take a long time before improvements in education and physical living conditions change ways of being and acting.

In addition to the leadership, the top management and the support required from the chief of the executive branch, it is essential for every official within the administration to become in his turn a leader of the reform and also for the implementation of the reform to be as decentralized as possible, with direct responsibility being assigned to the ministers, department heads and directors of decentralized agencies within their respective spheres of competence. In addition, it is necessary for there to be a central nucleus coming directly under the office of the President to undertake studies and research, formulate policies and co-ordinate efforts to provide the background material on which the President can base his decisions and, above all, to construct the over-all plan for the administrative reform. This plan does not necessarily have to include each and every step and measure that should be taken in detail, but it should clearly indicate what the purpose of the reform is and what the targets are, and give a general idea of the means available for achieving them.

This kind of plan, which might take between five and ten years to implement, should be flexible and also capable of being modified as time goes by in the light of experience.

Just as there should be a central technical nucleus under the direct authority of the executive branch, as is the case in Mexico with the Office of the President, similar units dealing with organization and systems should be established at a high level in each and every government department and section. This would ensure, among all the benefits of properly designed decentralization, that each major unit of government has its own responsibilities and views the reform as something generated from the inside and not imposed from the outside. In this type of work, much more is gained by encouraging people to work for themselves than by endeavouring to use the sheer weight of authority to impose decisions that are not always welcomed.

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As has already been noted in the present seminar, administrative reform has sufficient merit in itself to be a major component of a government's action programme in any developing country.

While it is not absolutely necessary to make the reform dependent on the scope and progress of development plans and programmes, it is clearly useful for a planned economy to have an efficient and well-organized public administration as a basic tool to promote over-all national development and save effort.

The closer the links between development plans and the structure, organization and operation of the administrative apparatus, the greater the benefit to the State. Nevertheless, many of the public sector's activities in the form of services have to be organized, improved and offered to the public irrespective of their links with development, for example municipal services, transport and communications, education and welfare.

#### 5. The case of Mexico

The preceding sections discussed the bases for administrative reform. It is now appropriate to take a brief look at the conditions existing in Mexico for implementing an administrative reform.

The President of the Republic, in his report to the Congress on 1 September 1966, stated the following:

"The progress made by the public administration is not in line with the spectacular advances made in many spheres of national development. While it is true that the administration has been able to complete its tasks successfully, it is also true that it is obsolete and that its systems are antiquated and outmoded, compared with modern administrative techniques.

"We intend to carry out a thorough reform of the public administration that will maintain our legal and political structure, as entrenched in the Constitution, untouched, and will create a sensible and balanced distribution of powers among the various public departments, define their terms of reference, and do away with old-fashioned practices and procedures. In sum, what we want is a modern, flexible and effective public administration that will be of greater service to the country's interests.

/"This is

"This is not something that can be done in a few weeks or months; it will need thought and preparation over a period of years, as it has in other countries that have implemented similar reforms. And it requires the co-operation of everyone, private individuals and public servants alike".

The President, speaking as the supreme head of the public administration in Mexico, has thus decided to carry out a thorough reform which, as he noted, will take some time and will have to be prepared. It is to be hoped that this very much desired reform will be achieved in a relatively short period of time, for the benefit of the nation as a whole.

It seems that conditions are now ripe for this. In Mexico at present, especially at the higher levels of the administration, there are a good number of highly qualified technicians and executives fully capable of planning and executing this extremely important task.

Furthermore, those speaking for the organized private sector have indicated that they will pledge all their support to it.

Universities, institutes, academies and other intellectual circles will assuredly do all they can to co-operate in the practical implementation of the reform, especially as regards the training of human resources which, as noted earlier, is an essential component of it.

In conclusion, it may be said that conditions are at present favourable for reform: the authorities have a sense of purpose and decision, and there is unreserved national support for what the President intends to do.



