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PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
FOR
RURAL DEVELOPMENT



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LECTURE DELIVERED
ON
DECEMBER 8, 1961

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INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL STUDIES
THE HAGUE

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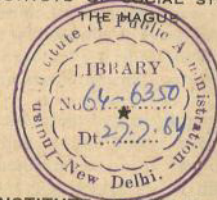
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PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

[Text of a lecture delivered by Prof. Dr. E. de Vries, Rector, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, on December 8, 1961]

I do not know whether I can tell you so much that is new and interesting for India. But I am very happy to put for discussion here the question of *how to adapt public administration in rural areas in an age of development*. One of the large questions looming in every nation looking for economic and social development is the role of the countryside, not only because the majority of the population lives in the countryside, but also because its problems are of a special nature. In many countries one has the idea that the countryside is a drag on economic and social development; that people are primitive or conservative or traditional and that indeed the main effort of Government and of the nation should be drawing in rural areas in the national development programme. As we well know, there are certain areas where the Government or the political party found it necessary to destroy, perhaps completely destroy, the social and economic structure of the countryside in an effort to have a rapid development, or like Soviet Russia in an effort to draw as many people away from the countryside as possible to man their new industries. But whatever political or philosophical system one follows, the administrative problems of the rural areas are indeed one of the key problems in development.

It is self-evident that development requires new forms of administration on the lowest level in the rural area. This need for change arises out of two different sources of inspiration, and it is promoted by two different lines of action and thought. The one, coming from within the rural area, is the penetration of the exchange economy. A rural area largely in the subsistence economy can indeed survive on a very

simple system of public administration. The changeover into the exchange economy or money economy, makes a number of old institutions unworkable. One of them is paying taxes in time, in labour, one called the *corvee* in France and when in the 18th century, it took too much effort, this was one of the main reasons for the French Revolution. In Africa it was called the "tribal turn-out" and this tribal turn-out is no longer applicable if people work on estates or in mines, and is not applicable if people have to look after their coffee or cotton plantations. Similarly in Asian countries, one finds at the beginning of this century, a turn away from the massive labour given by everybody in the village for execution of small public works. I am saying this in spite of the fact that it seems—only seems—as if in community development you get a revival of this old system. I believe that the co-operative work of people in community development comes from a completely different philosophy and has a different root in the administration, and I hope I can establish that thesis later on tonight.

The second necessary change in administration in the rural area is derived from the new concept people have of the Government's task towards the rural areas and society as a whole. It was the policeman and the tax collector gathering some, if only meagre, financial funds for the Central Government from the village and of course keeping rest and order in a measure which executed the traditional Government tasks in Europe as well, until one got this new image, the economic, the cultural, the social task of Government. This is a relatively new idea. The beginnings of it are in some of the smaller European countries. I might mention Denmark where these were felt first of all, something around 1850. But in most countries it is much more recent, and if you look at the preceding of thousands years of rural administration, this is really a revolutionary principle. It pervades from a new basic philosophy of what Government is, or should be and it should, of course, effect the rural areas as much as the urban areas. But it is exactly the application of this new goal, this new target, this new principle of Government activity that poses problems of adaptation

of rural administration. In the old forms the public administration in rural areas is characterised by the fact that it is an administration of self-contained units, units of different structure and of different size, but self-contained, as one of the basic similarities in the early systems; sometimes there is an occasional agglomeration of self-contained units but even if they are in an agglomeration as appears in the typical feudal system, where a number of villages or a whole rural area is ruled under one feudal lord, under that one feudal lord each of the units is still self-contained. There is very little exchange, very little correlation between the measures in one village as against another. It takes a very strong feudal ruler to make changes that penetrate the whole of the rural area. In the whole history of the Chinese Empire, one can establish three or four points where basic change in the concept of the relationship between the peasant and the overlord came into being. These are glorious points of Chinese history but soon after the structure of the empire it crumbled down and the internal cohesion faded away.

In Asia, the basic self-contained unit has been, in practically all countries, the village community. In Africa, it has been more the tribal or clan community and that applies also for the Amero Indians and for the South Pacific Islands, and of course also as a remnant is prevalent in the remote so-called tribal areas of a number of Asian countries. Such a village community can be a republic or it can be a dynasty. It does not make very much difference, the way it actually operates; but looking ahead for changes in the public administration, I believe it is interesting to distinguish between the village republic and the village dynasty. The village dynasty rule is exemplified by the feudal system where some overlord ruled land tenure and allotted land to people, also extracted money from them, as a self-perpetuating organism of public administration; the village republic as a sort of self-rejuvenating, not self-perpetuating system of administration, and again that distinction between the two types of administration is useful for analysis. By the way, I do not at all agree with Dr. Wittfogel who maintains that in Asia irrigation always turns into tyranny or despotism.

There are many areas in Asia where one had under a system of the village, of the clan, autonomy and a republican basic democratic system, a well-operated system of irrigation. But I must say that the ruling classes often grabbed a monopoly over irrigation canals. As in Europe in the early middle ages was done, with the water-mills they grabbed one monopolistic element in monopoly in order to fortify their rule. But this is not necessary.

The new forms have one common element as against all the others. The administration on the lowest level in the smallest unit now is part of a national system of public administration and this principle is very new. This principle is new in Europe, perhaps 50 or 80 years old. In the United States still it is not yet prevalent. In the United States, the administration on the very local level is not yet part of a national public administration system and some of the fights about racial discrimination and school integration, etc. are the result of the philosophy in the United States that at the local level one is independent from and should remain independent from a national public administration system. On the other hand in Europe, and in most of the new nations in Asia also, the idea is prevalent that public administration in the rural areas should be, as much as possible, a part of the national system. Of course, a nation which is dedicated to a principle of social welfare, rapid economic development and a system of planning must adhere to the principle that one cannot leave the rural administration out of the national system. It must be part and parcel of it. But then the thing is, how do you do it? Here again two forms are being elected. When I looked, when I just had a glance at the publication of your Institute, on administration in the five year plan, I found there practically the same two words as I had written down for myself, although perhaps my appreciation would be a shade different from what I saw at a glance. One is "democratic decentralization" and the other "decentralised democracy".

To start with the second one: decentralised democracy means that one puts the village self-rule as the basic principle

of rural public administration and the contacts with the national organs of administration and planning and supervision and guidance are related to a basically autonomous self-ruling unit. We have that system in North-western Europe in general and I find this as a rather common philosophy in Asia. We had that in Java under a law, which was promulgated in 1905, where the autonomy of the village was recognised by the Central Government as the cornerstone of rural public administration.

The other one is decentralised execution of policies or measures and if that is democratic, so much the better. But that does not have to be democratic. The decentralised execution is typical for Africa. Africa under the colonial regime and still now suffered from one very basic weakness that there were no territorial local units of administration. There were only tribal units and the tribal units were not geographically contiguous. Even if somebody moved, he remained under the rule of a tribe or sub-tribe or sub-sub-tribe. That was just as much specialised as your caste system was. But these were definitely administrative units rather than social units as was your caste system. So when colonial administration started to get some impact through measures on the local level that had to go through a system of territorial units, districts and sub-districts, it developed nominated and gradually also elected district and sub-district councils rather large units, created artificially by a decree from above, not developed naturally from below, as the self-ruling village is. Another area where decentralised execution is typical consists out of the Latino countries: Spain, Portugal and Latin America. And the unit there is the large agricultural enterprise, the Fundo or Hacienda in different names and forms. The Hacienda is not feudal because it is a commercial operation and did not rest on feudal principles but it became seniorial pseudo-feudal. That system also was prevalent in the early years of the 19th century in Eastern Germany and it prevailed in parts of Russia and has indeed killed to a large extent in the latter half of the 19th century the old Russian Mir which was a typical Indo-European self-ruling village community. And I would

again think that the murder of the Mir was one of the basic sources of the social revolution in Russia.

I would not say that decentralised execution as against village self-rule, is *per se* bad. Under certain circumstances, as I saw it in Tanganyika and in the Sudan with a density of population of three or five on a square mile one just cannot have villages. There are no villages. There are only clusters of three or four houses and then a few miles there is a cluster of a few houses. People are nomadic. How can you have village self-rule under these circumstances?

* * *

These two systems are in being in the world and the new forms must make either these decentralised bodies democratic or it must fit the village into a national public administration. I believe this is the typical situation in a process of development. Now I will mention just a few of the problems and you can find out for yourselves some others.

The first one is the carrying capacity of the lowest unit. In a modern administration there should be some staff. There should be some officials. They should be paid in money. And one must have a certain minimum number of families that can pay for the minimum staff even if one has an elected village chief or a nominated Dutch Burgomaster, who is a rich farmer and does not need much money. He needs a Secretary and a few other people on his staff. In 1905 the villages in Java started with something like 500 of 1,000 inhabitants. Now there are 500 or 1,000 families, five to six times as large. And between the padukuan, the hamlet and the village in Java tensions developed as the social ties, which are the basic element in the village self-rule, work on the hamlet level and not on the administrative village level. In Japan likewise, the Mura, the Japanese word for village, has practically everywhere a minimum of 8,000 to 10,000 inhabitants and some 2,000 families. And the Japanese find that it is impossible to raise funds through taxation to pay for the minimum staff for less than that number of people.

We have exactly the same problem in the Netherlands at the moment. In certain areas we are abolishing a number

of small municipal councils and combining villages into one municipal area. One of the islands which was flooded during the War, the island of Schouwen in Zeeland, and those among you who have been in Holland know where this is located, there were in 1953, 22 independent municipalities. Now there are only five.

So the necessary instrumentalisation of the village administration causes everywhere in the world the need for amalgamation of the smallest units and this causes tremendous social and sometimes political tensions. Who is going to be the boss? Where is the main village located? You have to walk more miles to the municipal office. As one of the universal problems one gets this clash between the efficiency of the minimum carrying capacity of a certain area and the old social ties. You see this problem does not operate at all where you have decentralised execution. It may be possible to have decentralised democracy on the basis of district or sub-district, if people are not accustomed to village self-rule. So in Tanganyika to have elected land boards dealing with basic problems of land tenure and subdivision of land, etc. is possible on a district level because people never were accustomed to deal with these problems on the village level. They were only accustomed to deal with it on the tribal level and not in a geographical unit. But if you try such a thing in Asia or in Europe you are in great difficulties and the resistances of the people.

In Viet Nam, I found the same great difficulties and one of the hot beds for the Vietcong—the so-called Communists in Viet Nam—is the resistance of the outlying hamlets. They do not want to be ruled by a more central village. And there are on the average in Viet Nam eight hamlets to one village. If I am not mistaken I found in the literature somewhere that you have half a million villages in India, which will turn out to about 180,000 panchayats. So you have a modest attempt at the amalgamation of small units into panchayats as areas which can be handled on the local level. Other countries have gone far beyond that amalgamation of the average three to one as you seem to be planning in India.

Now a *second* important question is *how does one put together* in one form or another, such a *village council*? All around the world one has a common principle that there should be some governing body, generally elected. If it is nominated then pretty soon one gets such political resistances and tensions that some sort of election is introduced. But who will elect the members of the village council? Do you see them as the lowest link in the chain for your national system of election? Or do you see them as something separate from your national scheme? This concept is of enormous importance for the way in which elections are carried out and how they are related. In Pakistan where the normal elections for Parliament did not work at all they came to a principle of so-called basic democracy, where on the village level one elects electors for the provincial and thereafter for the national parliament. If one does that, immediately everybody who has an interest in the composition of the state, provincial or national parliament, will see to it that his candidates are elected by the village, so that inevitably one finds that the political parties, and there are generally three or four in a country, sometimes there are only two, will indeed find a way into the process of election of the village council. It may have advantages, but it may have great disadvantages.

To give you an example from Africa after the British had left the Sudan, the Gezira Board which is a Corporative Board dealing with the whole area of the Gezira scheme, the cotton area, had to be elected. On the first election—they had fortunately every three years an election—they had all the bearded Sheikhs and the Mullahs, who were elected into that body. They were very ineffective. They were all very venerable old men. They were accustomed to sipping coffee and playing trick-track in the village coffee house, but they were not at all equipped for governing the Gezira scheme. So one can well understand that at the second elections some young people who had been studying in Europe and Moscow could convince everybody that these were the wrong men and that the youngsters should be elected to the Council. So after three years in the second

election all of a sudden one found a Council, if I should give it a colour, a very pink coloured council in the Gezira Board and that did not work either, because one can be successful college candidate from Germany, or Russia or Holland or England and not be an administrator. So again they were elected on a principle which did not suit the Gezira Board. It was definitely politically inspired. Very fortunately the Sudanese are very reasonable people. In the third election two years ago we have a very nice mixture. Some of the hot-blooded young people and some of the more cold-blooded wise old people and a number of technicians that had stayed out of the first elections altogether. A number of technicians came in, because they saw that neither the first nor the second system worked very well. It is very important if you set up a system of election for your councils. On what principle should it be set up? Will it be on communal interests? Will it be of so-called independent people that have the highest esteem of most of the people in the village? Or, will you promote your various political parties to go to the village level and put up their candidates for election? The success of the local administration depends a great deal upon the system which is growing and which is used in these elections. Now, in certain areas you will have communal or tribal groupings. In the Netherlands after about 140 or 150 years of experience with these elected municipal councils, the political parties have come in but we are very happy when we see that on the municipal councils in the Netherlands there is one-third of the membership so-called independent, not allied to anyone of our political parties because it is impossible for Parliament, and it is almost impossible for the provincial councils to elect. But independent members at the village level this still is a common feature and I believe it is very sound to have some counter-balance against too deep an influence of national political parties in your rural administration.

The *third* problem: If one accepts the necessity of executing national development policies in and through the rural administration, how does one get a *link with the technical services*? How is the link through the school with

your educational system? How is the link through clinics and hospitals with the health services? How is your link with your agricultural or animal husbandry and other extension services? And one might say for India, how is the link between these panchayats and your community development schemes? Where and how is that link made? That is a basic public administration problem. Everywhere one has some type of *budgetary control*, that is generally repressive after the fact. In a number of cases one tries to execute control beforehand. But that requires a very smooth working national system to have budgets approved in time by somebody higher up, and if you have a very large number of local budgets, it seems that agreement on the budget before execution may slow down so that the budget will only be approved when the year is already over. But then one has as a second measure in many countries a *control on legislation*. Local ordinances, local regulations, are generally to be screened to see whether they are in conformity with national legislation in two ways. In the United States the general rule is that it is left to the court. They are valid as long as they are not challenged in court and then the court can throw it out, as we all read in the newspapers about these regulations on racial measure as school integration, etc. But in other countries one has a system of agreement. We have that in Holland too. An ordinance from the municipality is not valid unless the Governor of the Province has agreed to it and if he disagrees then the municipality can go to the Queen and her officers for a review of the decision of the Provincial Governor and his body.

But some form of legal control is necessary, otherwise one again stays in that early stage of self-contained units and it is not part of a national administration and of a national development programme. As long as it was self-contained unit separated by rivers and deserts and forests, one would not mind if there were completely different rules and regulations. But you cannot have that in a modern state and if you don't want to take away all self-rule, there must be a control over legal measures. That is again a very complicated subject,

I only mention it because this is one of the important fields of problems.

Another is a *fourth* one which is new, the newest of all, as budgetary and legal control are generally instituted immediately. That I would call planning assistance. Planning assistance in European countries is becoming increasingly a function of specific organs of the province mainly helping municipal council administrations to plan for the future. I feel that this planning assistance is something which in your community development blocks and districts is one of the basic needs of India in order to see that your panchayats really can work effectively in the framework of a national policy. People knowing of the national policy should try to translate that into factual terms for various sets of circumstances. Let me say one cannot do that through general administrative measures sent out from the centre. It would not fit in most of the places. But to organise planning assistance is rather difficult. Perhaps one needs all three—budgetary control, legal scrutiny of various measures, and helping people develop their own plans.

The trouble in our country, and I believe that is also at the moment very much the case in the United Arab Republic and Egypt where they are trying all these three at the same time, is that one should not make the burden too heavy. One can indeed, although on paper there is autonomy and independence, initiate too much assistance and too much control and in that case little is left of real independence and of the real objective of self-rule on the local level is lost. Again here is one of the finest touches of public administration: *how to have effective assistance and control without it being felt to hurt at the local level*. That is not a science, that is an art. Very, very difficult. I believe that the principles involved again are three and I will gloss over them rather rapidly in view of the time.

One is, at all costs one must maintain *democracy at the grass-root level*. If you do not do that your nation will turn into a human machine under a totalitarian regime, regardless of the basic philosophy you start from. Unless you

maintain democracy at the grass-root level you will not succeed. One of the basic differences between Soviet Russia and Yugoslavia is that Yugoslavia, though socialist-communist, has maintained democracy at the grass-root level; very interesting to see how that fits into their state planning and programme and their communistic principles. I believe this is held all along the road.

Secondly, at the same time one must find ways and means to have *execution of national or provincial programmes*. You match the two. They are contradictory principles. If you really want to push your national or your provincial programme regardless of anything and you railroad it through, you kill democracy at the grass-roots. Both have to be done. If you have only democracy and no national plan then you make no progress and you want to do with both.

Thirdly, to confound the difficulty, you must maintain or strive after *operational efficiency*. You can combine a number of these wishes if you have plenty of staff and if you have plenty of money. But if as is the case practically everywhere you have to work on a meagre budget, with shortage of staff, operational efficiency becomes one of your main governing principles. Now, it is three dimensional and very hard to make it really into a beautiful cube-democracy at the grass-roots, execution of national programmes and operating efficiency. I think there are very few countries where the cube fits. We have all kinds of three dimensional forms and figures. But I believe the three are always to be kept into account.

In the whole of this tangle of problems which cannot be avoided there is one figure that carries all the burdens, that is the Burgomaster or the Major or the village chief. He is everywhere in the world, the man with two loyalties, with two bosses. In the Netherlands he is nominated by the Queen and he is responsible to the elected municipal council. So he must execute the orders from his council, at the same time he must execute the orders coming from the Minister of Home Affairs to him. I believe that this is true everywhere in the world except where one either forgets about the democracy at grass-roots or one forgets about the

national goal and the national programme. It is easy if you have just one boss and may forget the other. But in good conscience the village chief, even in remote areas, will feel that he has to translate in local terms what he hears from the district chief, and the district chief hears from the Governor of the province what the Government wants. He must translate that in such a way that his people will understand, will follow, will acquire, will work, if possible will participate, and will be enthusiastic. That enthusiasm cannot flourish everywhere, because we are frail human beings, but in the line of the art and science of public administration, the key person in the whole is not the technical expert, it is not the district chief. They all have one goal and one boss but the municipal Burgomaster or village chief has two bosses and he must have two bosses if he is to succeed. Let us forgive him if he does not succeed.

Now as to the last subject, how can the Central Government through its organ give assistance to this almost impossible task of having an efficient rural public administrative programme. Here I would mention four points.

One is a systematic and intensive *training* of the officials of the local bodies, before they take up their posts, on-job training and as an on-going programme in training courses or quarterly meetings of a seminar type where the local problems are being discussed. This on-going training of the lower officials is I believe one of the keys to a success of democratic rural public administration.

And the second one is that it is the holy duty of a national or a provincial or district government to give the *fullest information* about the national or provincial programme. The translation of these programmes into the lowest levels has to be left to the municipal council and the Burgomaster or village chief. But he must have ample information. I found that in most countries this on-going process of giving information in understandable terms and not just in technical jargon is missing and is one of the main reasons why local administration in rural levels is a flop. In some countries it is a great struggle to do a little

bit more than just collecting taxes and have the police maintain order.

And then I feel in all countries one must get to a combination of *planning assistance* and *financial assistance*. Planning assistance alone will not help if it is not backed up with the possibility of some subsidy from a higher level to a lower level in the execution. It is like window shopping with hungry children. One can tell them as technicians what they should do on the lower level but if there is no financial backing to this advice, it is not worth much. And it is found on the local level as a nuisance, a disturbance of their peace because then you see when you tell them what will be the effect of this road if it were built, or of this irrigation scheme if it were built, and then there is no following it up, and you are in real trouble as you had vetted their appetite and you don't give them anything. So this part, planning assistance combined with a reasonable system of financial assistance is a problem of administration on a higher level than on the local rural level. That must be of any administration, I suppose, such as the one in India on the provincial or state level, in the Netherlands also, it is on the provincial level combined with, for the larger works, the Central Government and therefore if indeed you go into modern rural public administration as part of a national programme, its main channel is the combination of planning and financial assistance.

