

13. Item 11 of the Agenda : President's Address

Addressing the General Body, the President, *Shri Jawaharlal Nehru*, said:

Whenever I speak on these occasions it is not so much about the very important specific problems with which you deal but rather on certain general considerations which, I think, are

important. I am just trying to refresh my memory as to what I said last year on this occasion. I am afraid I might repeat myself, though a certain measure of repetition about important matters is not bad.

Yesterday, it so happened, I was in Mussoorie and I paid a visit to the Research Centre of the Community Development Organisation. I was very much impressed by that little Centre, only about 50-60 persons taking a course for, I think, six weeks at a time. Each batch contains a number of servicemen and a number of non-servicemen. I dislike, and I don't think it is quite correct to use, the words "officials and non-officials", which are a relic of the British times. People are servicemen and non-servicemen; that I can understand. What am I? Am I an official or non-official? I am obviously an official but I am not a serviceman. The correct description, therefore, is a serviceman and a non-serviceman, just as in our diplomatic service we might say a particular person is a careerman or a non-careerman, though they are both in service. So both these are, I find, mixed up at this Research Centre, but when I stopped a little while at the Centre I did not meet them, as normally I am supposed to meet people. When I pay a visit the people are generally collected together and I am supposed to address them, which may be sometimes helpful but not very much, and certainly I get no idea of what they are doing. But this time I found them carrying on their work separately. Each group, which, for some reason I could not understand, was called a syndicate; and each syndicate was discussing a subject heatedly. There were seven syndicates and the idea was to discuss a subject for two weeks or so, then draw up a report and circulate it to other syndicates which discuss it. Ultimately all syndicates meet together for a joint discussion of their individual reports. Obviously this method seems to me superior to listening to lectures. If two people come out, meet and criticise each other's views on a subject, their consideration of that subject becomes more and more mature and deeper.

So I was rather impressed by this method, specially in a study of a subject which is not a subject about which you get too many precedents, which is a dynamic, growing subject. In a sense community development in its various aspects covers such a variety of public administration that although it does not deal with higher echelons of public administration it does deal with its lower levels in the rural areas and almost everything in the rural areas comes into touch with community development. And I feel that more and more attention is needed to these what might be called the lower ranks of public administration, than to the higher ranks. Higher ranks are important. Because higher ranks get some attention they are much more in the public

eye, but the lower ranks are much more important for the life of the common people. I do not know how far this *Institute* or other institutes of the kind think of that aspect of administration at the level of the petty revenue official, the petty this and the petty that, who is far more important from the point of view of the average resident of India, specially in the village, than high officials. Here, you may well recall an old story of an old lady whose son was, I believe, being tried for a very serious offence, may be murder, before the High Court. And when he was acquitted by the High Court, the old lady thanked the Judge saying : "May you rise to be a Kotwal!" (Circle Police Official). For her the Kotwal was a much more important person than the High Court Judge. She had to deal with him daily. So we have to think of the lower functionaries, for they are the base.

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Great stress is being laid at present by the Planning Commission, by the National Development Council, and generally by Government on panchayats, co-operatives, etc. One aspect of that stress is that these organisations should not be officialised, that they should be controlled by the people of the village who form the members, and that the official element should be rather distinctly advisory—of course, helpfully advisory—but not at all in the sense of bossing over, interfering, and not allowing, if I may say so, the members of the panchayat to make any number of mistakes. Let them make mistakes; let us accept that a mistake is often better than the helplessness and powerlessness which comes from somebody sitting on top and carrying on the business of the panchayats. They will never grow by that. Now that is an important emphasis. There is nothing new about it. But it is an emphasis on the great part of the administration in the lower levels being carried on by the non-service elements, the non-official elements; and that brings new problems in its train. Presumably, when you deal with the administration most of the time you are thinking more of the service—not always of course. Now, as the country advances and specially as it advances towards the socialist pattern, there are likely to be more and more people engaged in Government service, the State services, at all levels. That is bound to happen. But far more persons should be engaged in administrative service in a voluntary way, in a non-service manner. In fact, we should draw in almost every active member of the public to do something or the other, in some form or the other, in some way, and thus have a large network of administration. I should like this *Institute* to devote its attention to the study of the administrative problems lower down the official scale, and more especially to the question of the non-serviceman coming into the picture and taking part in administration at the

lower levels and growing as he does this work because the most important thing is that when he does it he grows.

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Nowadays we are talking a good deal about co-operatives, and it is suggested that we should cover every village as a co-operative, barring perhaps—I do not know—some special areas, like tribal areas, which will also have co-operatives, maybe of somewhat different kind. Now this is a pretty big undertaking—having every village in India as a co-operative. Again that requires a good deal of work, some kind of training, sometimes highly specialised, sometimes a little less so, and I take it that Governments—State and Centre—are going to take steps to train people of every type through highly specialised courses, maybe of a year or six months, shorter courses of a month, even shorter courses for the panchas and the sarpanchas of three or four days, just to explain to the millions of villagers to give them some idea of co-operative and panchayat work. We are launching out, in this way, in new directions outside the scope of our old administrative apparatus and we want to give far greater power to panchayats and to the village co-operatives than they have today, knowing full well that they may misuse it, make mistakes, and the like. The mistakes of the panchayats will not endanger the security of the country. We can survive it. But they will suffer for it, they will learn from it, and the public will learn from it too.

In fact, the biggest mistakes or the biggest of errors that we commit are the errors of not doing things or delaying things. I am convinced of that. A mistake is far better than not doing a thing. You can rectify an error but you can never catch back the time you have lost by not doing something. Enough stress had been laid, in my address last year, on what I have said above. This year also, a reference has been made to this question of delay, to procedures which involve delay—apart from the individual's slackness, it is procedures that involve delay. In spite of every effort, we still go through procedures which involve far too great delays. We have to be careful. There is a word which has a bad odour about it. It is a big word—bureaucratisation—too much bureaucracy. Bureaucracy is essential. Bureaucracy means organised work. There is nothing wrong about it—about work in an office; but if we have too much of it, it grows by—what is it called?—Parkinson's Law. Bureaucracy really has an amazing capacity to grow and create work for itself which is not wanted for public purposes at all. We then work for each other. We have to be always on our guard against this and the best way to avoid all this trouble is to avoid processes involving delay.

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The other day I was in south India, in the southern districts of Madras. It had nothing particularly to do with public administration, but I was very much impressed by the rapid improvement being made there in primary education. In numbers alone, of course, the progress has not been much, but it was very impressive and heartening. Every two miles I had to stop because there was a school and the children were lined up. I travelled about 49 miles by an open car, and you can imagine hundreds and thousands of school children, vast numbers, standing by, and many of them of amazingly small age; to me they looked to be 4-5 years and upwards. The Madras Government has specially introduced midday meals and what they call school improvement societies. I went to two conferences of school improvement societies and I was astonished at the bigness of their organisation. Each had about 12,500 teachers, and at least a considerable number of them were women, collected together and discussing their problems in an orderly way—how to improve their schools. There was a wonderful display of gifts; it was an astonishing display really. The quantity itself was impressive, all collected from parents, and others, for the improvement of the schools. What was more significant was a spirit of enthusiasm among the teachers and parents and all concerned, and all co-operating. There were many Catholic schools and other schools, all co-operating in this. That heartened me more than many things that I usually see.

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We are today giving a great deal of intensive thought to the third Five-Year Plan, the approach to it, the size of it, the content of it. We are still in the initial stages although we have been discussing it very deeply for at least six months. We want the greatest discussion, the greatest consideration not in a wishful thinking way, not in a general way as perhaps inevitably we have had to do when we started our First Plan but in a more detailed and concrete manner, looking well into the future; because the more you think of the Plan, the more you have to look to the future in five years, ten years, 20 years, in a perspective way. The Plan is for every aspect of our life and it affects even our institutional approaches; and the problem comes up to us in various ways. How far the present type of institution is suited to the type of society for which we are working? Some institutions are good, I am not criticising them; but it is not a question of goodness or badness but of fitness. How far the existing institutions will fit in with the type of society that we are trying to evolve? This *Institute* will have to keep this particular matter very specially in mind and try to follow the thinking of the evolution of the third Plan from the institutional point of view.

There are sometimes discussions and criticisms, specially in Parliament, about the public sector or the new corporations and other undertakings in the public sector that are functioning; and, I think, it is a very good thing that these criticisms take place in Parliament, though very often they are not wholly justified. Nevertheless, it is a good thing. Of course, the private sector has no such tribunal to face, unless some major development takes place, when something may be said in the newspapers. But the newspapers are always full of questions and statements and discussions on the public sector.

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Now I do not wish to be unfair to anybody but I should like to say that my firm opinion gathered after some knowledge is that the public sector in India today is infinitely superior to the private sector. I have not a shadow of doubt about it; it is superior in competence, superior in economy, and superior in the general outlook it is developing or the general public outlook. And I say, more especially, that, in spite of all the criticisms and the numerous errors and mistakes that we have made and we are making, it is more efficient and more economical. Despite occasional errors here and there, I am very pleased at the way the public sector is developing in India, whether it is the Sindri, whether it is the Chittaranjan, whether it is the Machine Tools, whether it is the Telephone Factory or any other project. You cannot easily adjudge the Hindustan Aircrafts: projects like these you can only measure by cost efficiency. Nobody gives them any publicity, not much, so that I should like to put on record my appreciation of the public enterprises. Even if you take the iron and steel plants, which are criticised, I think, they are very fine achievements—Rourkela and Bhilai. I should like to say that it is a very heartening sight how our people are working in the public sector; they are doing very good work.

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There is one thing to which I referred last time too. Ultimately, an administration has to work with some objectives in view, more especially in a dynamic society. Administration is not obviously just doing some odd job, putting a note on a file, etc. It has got to aim at an objective. If the objective is, let us say, the Plan, the Second Five-Year Plan, or the third Five-Year Plan that is coming, or let us say, a socialist pattern of society which we aim at, then surely the administrator has to think of that. He is not some kind of a static person who does not apply his mind to the basic objectives. He is working to an end, and must always keep that in view even in small things as also in big things.

It may be, of course, that the manner of doing something may differ as there are differences of opinion but the basic objectives should be inscribed in the room, on the walls of the administrator's office. That is "Where we are going to?" has to be remembered; only then can the institutions we have, be worked to that end properly.

Well, you have honoured me by electing me again as the *Institute's* President, in spite of the fact that I only appear here once a year; and I am grateful to you for it. Thank you.

14. The meeting was followed by an At Home.
