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Fourth Annual General Body Meeting

(April 5, 1958)

You have just re-elected me as the President of this Institute. As I was coming up here the Director told me that he troubled me only once a year. It was probably correct. Except for my this annual visitation, I beg to say, I do not function as President or in any other capacity associated with this Institute. That, of course, is my fault, not the fault of the Institute; and therefore I feel hesitant over this annual display of your confidence in me; but, on the other hand, it would be also silly if I were to cry about it. I am grateful to you if you are content with me as I am.

I suppose that during the past two years there has been a good deal of thinking and discussion, and a growing criticism, about the ways of public administration, the way Government works; it is a healthy sign, and to some extent it should always take place. This Institute of Public Administration is itself an outcome of that feeling—that Public Administration is a subject of great importance and that some organised thinking and study should be given to it, and not merely letters in the newspapers or something in the files.

As you know, we have an O&M Division in the Central Government here and possibly in some States too. S.B. Bapat, who has been intimately connected with this Institute's work, is also running the O&M Division whose function is to improve our methods of work, to avoid delay and have greater efficiency, and all that. Somebody referred to delay in one of the

questions raised on the Annual Report. As I remarked last year too, I have no doubt that the biggest and the most important thing in administrative work is the avoidance of delay. Most administrative troubles including corruption come from delay than from anything else. Therefore, it is a matter of highest importance. At the same time nothing is more difficult than to avoid delay. It is extraordinary how the ways of Government are so fashioned as to bring about delay. Maybe, it is because of the factor of the democratic procedure, or, even more than democratic, the bureaucratic procedure, because they are meant to help to check on each other and these checks become so overwhelming that the things sometimes are not done or done with a great amount of delay.

There has been some rethinking in recent years about the basic concepts underlying the administrative system, partly because it is inevitable and partly because we are passing through a great and transitional phase in social and economic spheres—involving as it does a tremendous extension of activities of the administration; government taking upon itself tasks that were not previously undertaken by it. We have had, as you know, during the last few years, many important reports on administrative questions—the Appleby reports, not one but two, and some others. We are constantly discussing in Parliament, whatever Ministry it be whose demands or activities are before it, about the public administration part of that Ministry. Today, this afternoon, we were discussing the demands of Ministry of Community Development and the criticism in Parliament was mostly about the administrative aspect—why a particular thing was not done normally, why it was delayed and why there was no public cooperation and similar questions.

Public administration, apart from the normal features that it should have, should be intimately concerned with public cooperation. The idea of a public servant sitting in a world apart and doing out impartial justice is completely out of place in a democratic society, and much more so in a dynamic democratic society, which is moving forward, because the very pace of moving forward depends not on the public servant at all but on the people, and if there is no intimate connection between the people and the public servant, then he may be efficient but there is no movement forward. The whole conception of the public servant in India has in the past been rather a static conception. Doing one's job as efficiently and adequately as possible, and impartially, was the conception in British times. As I was sitting here, I

glanced through an article in the recent issue of your Journal on "Civil Service Neutrality" by S. Lall. Civil Service neutrality is a fiction which I have often wondered at. How any thinking person can be neutral, I have not been able to understand. In the old days, of course, I know exactly what it meant, and I think it is a good thing within limitations; but the way it is pompously displayed is, I think, not only not right but completely wrong. That a civil servant should obviously be above party politics, I can understand. He must, as far as possible, be a detached, objective person, considering problems in a detached and objective way, and rendering advice for accurate action—that also I fully understand. But the way the concept of neutrality of the civil service is sometimes put forward, or the way it is considered, is something entirely different. During British times, there was a certain definite pattern of Government which the British Government had laid down; and neutrality meant keeping within the strict lines of that pattern of Government—going outside it was tantamount to lack of neutrality. Neutrality thus, in fact, meant extreme partisanship, not at all neutrality. Full acceptance of what the British Government had laid down, the four corners within which he was to function, that was called neutrality of the civil servant. If a person raised his voice against the established pattern, he was supposed to be an anarchist. That he had to function within a prescribed framework is understandable, but why call it neutrality?

In a period of dynamic growth, however, we want as civil servants persons who are not, if I may use the word without any disrespect, merely head clerks but people with minds, people with vision, people with a desire to achieve, who have some initiative for doing a job and who can think how to do it. But the person who is to be completely neutral is a head clerk and no more. He would do his work efficiently as a head clerk, no doubt, but nothing more. Can a person be neutral, I ask you, about basic things for which we stand for, our State stands for, or Plan stands for, *e.g.*, a socialist pattern of society?

Now, can a civil servant perform adequately functions relating to the attainment of a socialist pattern of society if he is entirely opposed to that conception? He might to some extent, but not with any enthusiasm because, if he is opposed to the very growth in that direction, then he is a drag on it. Again, our Parliament has often expressed itself against what might be called a communal approach to political problems. The Government is opposed to it. It is the point of view which either we have or do not have. It

no use declaring that we are neutral here. Neutrality has no meaning in this context. It is perfectly clear that, under a democratic form of government, different parties come into power at different times, and I can understand that the civil servant should not be partial to any party. But he cannot be neutral about the basic issues. I am not quite conversant with all the developments connected with advent of the Labour Government in Britain and how the civil servants there adapted themselves to it. But I happened to be in England on two or three occasions just about that time and I heard the bitterest complaint from the Labour leaders about the attitude of the Civil Services. I remember with what extreme warmth Harold Laski spoke to me about it.

The writer of the article on "Civil Service Neutrality" mentioned by me earlier says that the Civil Service in Britain is a model. Now it is an excellent Service, but this fact is seldom mentioned so openly, in that country. Lall has arrived at the same conclusions which I have reached in my own thinking. The British concept of the civil service neutrality is a logical outcome of the political framework within which the British Civil Service has grown and developed. During the last century, the major issue that divided the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party in England was free trade. Great arguments were put forward on both sides as if the future of the world depended on nothing else. The civil servant was supposed to keep his hands off such party issues. Things have, however, since changed a lot. Some sort of state intervention is now accepted by all, whether it be the Conservative Party, the Labour Party, the ordinary citizen or the civil servant.

In India, we are at present in a stage where all future development depends upon the acceptance of certain basic assumptions and on intelligent and prompt and quick action. What is the civil servant to do in these circumstances? Naturally he cannot be a partisan to any party, but must he be inactive and without any views of his own on basic matters? He will not be happy like that, nor will anybody be happy. Take another matter. I was wondering only yesterday, how far, at our school for the training of the IAS probationers, the trainees were being taught to apply their minds in a positive way towards the consideration of certain basic things for which we stand. Certain basic issues merged out of our struggle for freedom and we should give the probationers the background of these issues to enable them to understand intelligently the current problems of the country. But I am not in favour of too much conditioning of the mind. We must avoid any extreme

effort to condition the individuals as they do in some communist countries, and also in some other countries which are not communist. Such an effort is made in all countries in varying degrees. But too much of it does not quite fit in with the democratic process. To some extent there is always conditioning by school books which you choose as your text books. If you want to condition the mind in the normal way of nationalism, you would select books which applauded nationalists. We must, however, take care not to cramp pliability and individuality. There are certain major problems that the country faces today; and whether you hold a socialist view of life, or a cooperative view of life, a communal or an anti-communal outlook, you cannot be neutral to their solution. All of us have to be clear in our mind about them; the public servant too should be clear about them, though with an objective and detached approach. Otherwise he will not be able to put in that energy which he must towards their solution.

Here, I venture to re-emphasise two other important aspects of the problem. One is that in the modern age the success of the public servant lies, in addition to ability, efficiency and integrity, upon his capacity to cooperate with the public. It is an essential requirement of the public servant of today. If he cannot meet it, all this efficiency is not of much use. His real success in his job depends on the extent to which he can evoke public cooperation. The second aspect, to which we are at present directing our minds, is related to the training of the public servants initially in such a way as to avoid their developing an "ivory-tower" attitude in their careers.