

Economic Crisis and Administrative Incapacity in Zimbabwe

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Zimbabwe, at independence, inherited an administrative system which had been designed to serve the interests of the colonising power and the settler elements. Colonial administration in Zimbabwe, as elsewhere in Africa, had been tasked with the maintenance of law and order and the collection of revenue. The extent to which the post colonial government could transform this colonial administrative system into a viable and appropriate instrument for national development was dependent, not only on the will and engineering skills of the political leadership, but also on the availability of resources of all kinds, which could be utilized in creating a desirable administration.

It is now more than ten years since Zimbabwe attained political independence. The purpose of this paper is to focus on the various changes which have taken place in the national administration or public service in relation to the socio-economic crisis which seems to have pervaded all government and non-government activities and processes in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Africa. The paper also seeks to highlight some of the major elements of administrative incapacity or administrative under-development currently affecting the administration.

For most developing countries, the post-independence era is characterized by expansion of the Ministry at both the central and local or regional levels. New ministries and departments are usually created at the centre, some of the inherited ones are renamed and/or readjusted to suit the new socio-political order. At the local level, provincial and district structures are created or revamped to enable the grassroots to realise that the new government is indeed "their" government. There is also the inevitable "Africanisation" process, with the attendant dilution of experience, expertise, and therefore, effectiveness in the public service.

In Zimbabwe, the Presidential Directive of 1980, and the Prime Minister's Directive on Decentralisation of 1984 largely shaped the

major changes that have so far occurred in central and local administration. There have also been a number of cabinet reshuffles and re-organisation of various departments, all of which have resulted in the creation of what is generally believed to be one of the largest peace-time Ministries in the world, at least in relation to the economy. Political developments, notably the Unity Accord between the two major parties, have necessitated the creation of such new structures as Senior Minister, over and above the structures obtaining at independence.

The implications of these wide-ranging changes on the capacity of the economy to cope will be examined. The nature of the economic crisis is such that internal adjustments would need to take into account the consequences of an oversized and usually sluggish and inefficient administration. The expansion of public services, essentially implied in the creation of a large Ministry, can be considered to be contributory to the equitable distribution of income and benefits. But new wealth is not created by mere increases in the numbers of the people on the state's pay-roll. The policies and regulations which govern, and thus influence, the productive sectors of the economy have to be such that these sectors are energised and motivated to redouble their efforts in the interests of the nation as a whole.

To what extent has the Zimbabwe Government succeeded in adapting the inherited colonial administrative system and structures to suit the needs of the new society? What part has been played by the economic crisis in the shaping of the current administration; and, how does this administration manage the economy given the economic crisis. It is the contention of this paper, that inherited structures do not adapt easily, if at all, to the needs and aspirations of developing societies. Further, inherited structures, when the supposed changes have largely been peripheral, tend to lead to continued negation of the aspirations and expectations (including basic human rights and needs) of the masses of the people in developing countries.

Thus while the various changes and creations in the Zimbabwe Public Service have resulted in what may seem to be a strong administrative system, it can also be argued that the changes and creations have largely been of dubious utility in terms of the benefits and services they deliver to the various publics of the administration, notably to the ordinary people. Finally, and possibly central to this paper, is the truism that, as elsewhere in the world, the various changes, the levels of administrative capacity, and the

continuation of largely obsolete and inappropriate structures and systems is a function of the class formation processes in post-colonial Zimbabwe. Inherited colonial structures and systems are only maintained and preserved if they serve the interests of the ruling class or comprador class in a given neo-colonial polity.

Colonial administration

In the ninety years of colonial rule in Zimbabwe, the British had firmly established the Westminster type of public administration. Thus the normal features of a western-type bureaucracy, e.g. a hierarchical structure, a high level of departmentalisation, and a supposedly "apolitical" or neutral body of public servants, existed. Further, the administration was largely closed to, and insulated against, its various publics, and could therefore not be influenced, criticised or controlled by elements external to the politico-administrative structures.

The administration had the primary role of ensuring the maintenance of law and order and the collection of revenue. Intended, as it was, to serve the interests of the minority settler regime, the administration was necessarily small and its personnel racially determined. The administration was therefore dominated by whites, with Asians and Coloureds coming second, and the Africans last. Indeed, the majority of the Africans in the colonial public service occupied clerical and messengerial posts until a few years before the advent of national independence in April, 1980. Because it needed only to perform a limited role in public management, the colonial administration seems to have been efficient, at least compared to today's administration which is required to serve a much larger and more complex and diverse public.

Post-independence reforms

The colonial situation, briefly discussed above, and the provisions of the Lancaster House Agreement largely determined the extent to which the new Zimbabwe Government could reform the national administration to suit the new socio-political order. The maintenance of a largely capitalist mode of production in the Zimbabwe economy further restricted the possibility of a meaningful departure from the inherited administrative system. Capping all of these are the class interests of those who had assumed power at independence. To a considerable extent, the status quo in the nature of the inherited administrative system enhanced and protected the interests of the comprador class. The absence of any meaningful

administrative reforms in the Zimbabwe public service must therefore be seen in the light of the prevailing politico-socio-economic situation in Zimbabwe. There have, nevertheless been a few changes in the inherited administration, and some of these are worth noting.

Presidential directive

It has been stated above that the colonial administration was dominated by white officers. At independence, for example, there were 10570 established officers in the public service, of which only 3368 or 31.8% were black. The highest black-occupied position then was that of Senior Administrative Officer (SAO).¹ The Lancaster House Constitution (or Constitution of the Republic of Zimbabwe 1980) made provisions for the partial transformation of the public service, at least in terms of the racial composition of the Service:

The President may give general directions of policy to the Public Service Commission with the object of achieving a suitable representation of the various elements of the population in the Public Service...²

In accordance with this provision, the President, in May 1980, issued a directive to the Public Service Commission (PSC) aimed at waiving existing rules and regulations governing public service recruitment and promotion. In part, the Presidential Directive required the PSC:

(a) to recruit staff to all grades of the Public Service in such a manner as will bring about the balanced representation of the various elements which make up the population of Zimbabwe;

(b) to give more rapid advancement to suitably qualified Africans in appointments and promotions to senior posts in the Public Service;

(c) in carrying out these directions, to have due regard to the maintenance of a high state of efficiency within the Public Service, and the need to satisfy the career aspirations of existing public servants; and,

¹ Ibbo Mandaza, "The Zimbabwe Public Service"; Paper presented at the UN Inter-Regional Seminar on Reforming Civil Service Systems for Development; Beijing, China; 14 - 24 August, 1985, p. 24.

² Republic of Zimbabwe, Constitution of Zimbabwe; Chapter VII (75) (2) amended 1985.

(d) to make an annual report on progress.³

The PD thus facilitated rapid entry of Africans, most of them highly qualified, into the Public Service. This move greatly disturbed white civil servants most of whom took advantage of the Early Retirement Incentive Scheme and resigned from the Public Service. Some of them emigrated to South Africa and other countries, but others joined the private sector. This was in spite of the fact that the PD sought to reassure the white administrators thus:

The Government continues to need the services of these [white] officers to ensure an high standard of efficiency in carrying out... new and expanding programmes.⁴

Government provided the PSC with an additional \$ 100 000 for the specific purpose of implementing the PD. However, only a small fraction of this amount was used since the approved establishment was expanded, and also because many white officers elected to resign from the service, thereby making the creation of supernumerary posts unnecessary.

The implementation of the PD had several implications for the Public Service. First it resulted in a serious shortage of trained and experienced personnel in most government departments. This shortage was most keenly felt in technical and specialised ministries and departments. Second, the mass exodus of experienced officers meant that little on-the-job training could be provided to the new recruits and newly promoted officers. The majority of officers in the Service during the first few years were largely learning their jobs by trial and error method. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that prior to 1980, institutional training facilities were limited and largely restricted to the training of clerical staff and field based agricultural extension officers.

Third, the dilution of expertise and experience in the Public Service resulted in inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the administrative machinery, just at the time when the demands for meaningful development, reconstruction and rehabilitation of the economy were highest. For example, while responding to the findings of the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee in 1983, the Minister of State (Public Service) in the then Prime Minister's Office indicated

³ Government of Zimbabwe, Presidential Directive to the Public Service Commission. A Policy Statement, May 14, 1980.

⁴ Ibid.

that his ministry was experiencing difficulties in staffing the Public Service because of four main reasons, namely:

(a) The previous government had neglected to provide the necessary training for black Zimbabweans;

(b) Since independence, the Public Service had expanded with the creation of new ministries and departments;

(c) Under a so-called 'incentive scheme', numerous white Zimbabweans had left the Service; and,

(d) The Public Service was unable to compete with the private sector over salaries and there had been a lot of 'poaching'.⁵

Indeed, both Parliament and the mass media have frequently been quick to identify and expose public service weaknesses such as lack of or delayed responses to public demands, several administrative errors and outright corruption. What, perhaps, exacerbated the problem of rapid Africanisation in Zimbabwe was the expansion of the public sector as a whole since the advent of national independence. Brian Raftopoulos observes:

This process [of Africanisation] has not, however, been without its problems and there have been some very serious incidents of corruption, incompetence and inefficiency. Such problems, however, need to be analysed within the context of a vastly expanded public service, dealing with the needs of an expanding population, and in the process attempting to develop skills, structures and experience necessary to cope with the new demands.⁶

The "vastly expanded" Public Service is manifest in the creation of such new ministries as those of National Supplies, Political Affairs, Cooperatives, Community Development and Women's Affairs, and Youth, Sport and Culture. The expansion of the Public Service is best demonstrated in Table I below, which provides statistical data on the number of personnel in the various categories by year since 1979.

⁵ The Herald, Harare, December 12, 1983. The term 'poaching' is commonly used in Zimbabwe to describe a situation whereby the private sector makes use of high salaries and fringe benefits to attract qualified and competent people from the Public Sector or from other companies within the private sector.

⁶ Brian Raftopoulos, "Human Resources Development and the Problem of Labour Utilisation"; in Mandaza (ed.), Political Economy of Transition, p. 311.

TABLE I

Public Service Personnel by Year and Category

Year	Accounting Officers	Established Posts	Employee Posts	Total
1979	16 022	17 139	35 334	68 495
1980	14 198	18 595	35 445	68 238
1981	6 899	18 950	36 186	62 035
1982	13 664	22 049	36 873	72 388
1983	13 802	25 341	41 644	80 787
1984	13 944	26 867	45 534	86 345
1985	13 391	26 912	47 505	87 808
1986	13 422	29 680	49 027	92 129

SOURCE: Zimbabwe Public Service Commission

Although the PD was essentially about the complexion of the Public Service, the fact that it was implemented concurrently with other reform and re-organisation activities requires that some of these other activities be examined before a comprehensive analysis of the outcomes of the PD can be attempted. It is to these other reforms that this paper will now turn. It is, however, necessary to point out the term 'reforms' is used here in a rather loose way since there have been only peripheral changes to the inherited administrative structures and systems.

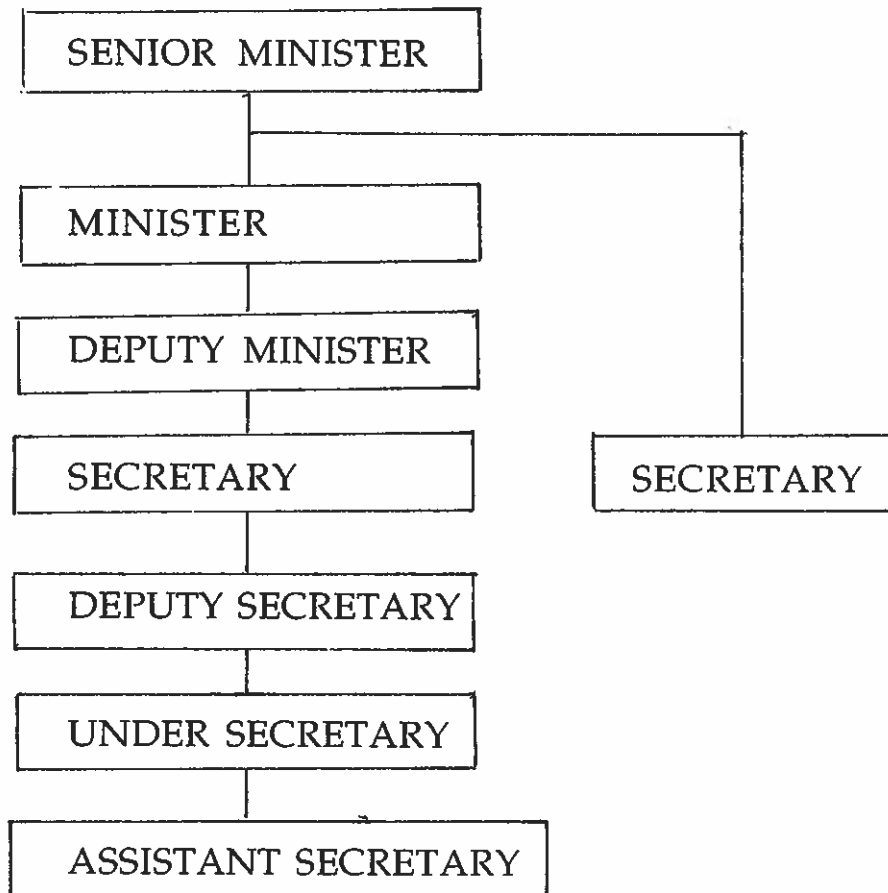
Structural changes and re-organisation

Although the basic structures of most ministries and departments have remained unchanged, there have been a few but significant reforms which have largely resulted in a more complex and clumsy bureaucracy. In any polity, administrative reforms are dictated by various factors, such as the nature of the political system, the ideology of the ruling elite, the size of the Ministry, and the complexity or diversity of the tasks to be undertaken by the bureaucracy. As noted earlier, there is a sense in which developments on the political front dictated, such as the Unity Accord between the two major political parties on 22 December

1987,⁷ necessitated the creation of three posts of Senior Minister, over and above the ministerial positions that had existed prior to that Accord.

The administrative significance of this is manifest in the fact that Senior Ministers needed to be assisted in their administrative functions by senior secretaries, most of whom were at the Permanent Secretary level. As Chart I below indicates, this new creation was in addition to the posts of Minister and Deputy Minister for most ministries.

CHART I
ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF A TYPICAL MINISTRY
IN ZIMBABWE
(Top echelons only)



This proliferation of top level positions in government must be understood in terms of the salaries drawn by the incumbents and the fringe benefits that are given to them. Given that Zimbabwe has at

⁷ On December 22, 1987, the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU-PF) signed a unity agreement with its rival party, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (PF-ZAPU).

least fifty-two persons occupying ministerial positions, and a total of twenty-three ministries and twenty-eight parastatal bodies, the drain on scarce resources for the salaries and benefits of the public personnel is staggering. That aside, there is the danger of assuming that the multiplicity of hierarchical levels will necessarily result in meaningful and effective checks and balances and division of labour. In most cases, however, the reverse is true as the administration so structured tends to suffer from overload, congestion and weak accountability systems.

It is the contention of this paper that the continued creation of the various structures was ill-advised and may well be counter-productive. With regard to the creation of the posts of Senior Minister and 'Senior Secretary',⁸ an internal document of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (FEDP) rationalises for the creation of these posts as follows:

The creation of the portfolios of Senior Minister and Senior Secretary is intended to provide the machinery for interministerial co-ordination, speedy and timely implementation of Government policies, programmes and projects... The principal role is to monitor the performance of the portfolio ministries and ensure that they carry out their respective terms of reference effectively; to ensure that the portfolio ministries are fulfilling the targets of the Development Plan; to monitor if the correct policies and procedures are being adopted in the management of the affairs of the portfolio ministries.⁹

The overall result of these changes is the emergence of a much more complex organisational structure, as indicated in Chart II below, than existed under the colonial regimes. Writing on the functions of permanent secretaries in nine Southern African countries, John D. Montgomery aptly observes: "... the civil servant's role may have changed in the mother country more than in the former colonies...".¹⁰ The same applies to the organisational structures and operational systems obtaining in the majority of these countries.

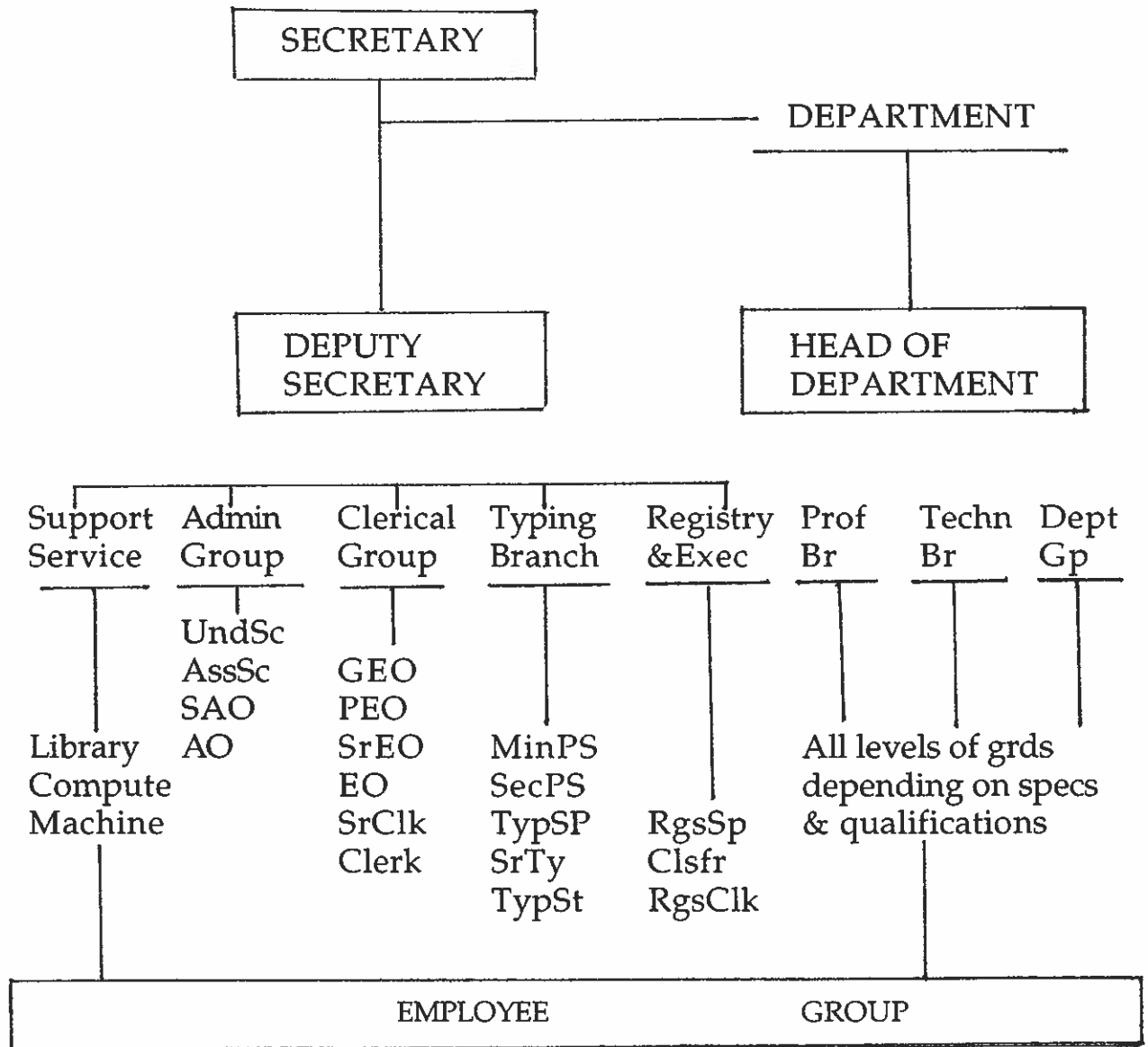
⁸ The Secretary of the Ministry of Public Service advised that the term 'Senior Secretary' is incorrect since the Secretaries servicing the Senior Ministers are at the same level as those heading other portfolio ministries. The term is, however, used in some of the Ministry of Finance Economic Planning and Development's internal documents.

⁹ Internal minute of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, setting out the functions of the Senior Minister and Senior Secretary.

¹⁰ John D. Montgomery, "Life at the Apex: The Functions of Permanent Secretaries in Nine Southern African Countries", *Public Administration and Development*: 6:3 1986, pp. 211 - 221.

CHART II

TYPICAL STRUCTURE OF A MINISTRY AND DEPARTMENT
PUBLIC SERVICE: ZIMBABWE



KEY:

Prof = Professional
 Exec = Executive
 UndSc = Under Secretary
 CEO = Chief Executive Officer
 Officer

Techn = Technical
 BR/GP= Branch/Group
 AssSc = Assistant Secretary
 PEO = Principal Executive

As mentioned earlier, the other major changes that have been effected since independence relate to the creation of new ministries and departments. To a considerable extent, this was necessitated by the fact that previous regimes, consistent with their roles and stated

policies, had tended to neglect certain basic essential functions which would have led to the provision of public and developmental services and programmes to the majority of Zimbabweans. The post-independence regime, naturally, sought to redress this unjust situation by ensuring that such functions and activities as women's affairs, youth and sport, and co-operative development would be catered for by specific ministries or departments.

There seems, however, to have been inadequate consultation and consideration of certain factors when these new structures or organisations were created. A United Nations publication notes:

The administrative organisation of a government is not an end in itself but a means for the achievement of national objectives. Its purposes are two-fold. The obvious purpose is to allocate the tasks of government so that they will be performed in a manner that is both efficient and economical, with a minimum of duplication and overlapping. Equally important, but less obvious, is the second purpose, which is to define the areas of and responsibility of administrative units so that they may be properly subject to constitutional and political controls.¹¹

The Zimbabwe Government has, since independence, striven to attain that most appropriate level of functional combinations of the various tasks that government has to provide. There have, therefore been several reshuffles of departments, from one ministry to another, relegation of some ministries to department levels and promotion of some departments to ministry status. There have been, at least, three major re-organisation exercises of the public service since 1980. Since that time, at least nine departments have been moved from one ministry to another; five former ministries are now mere departments; and, one department has now been promoted to ministry level albeit within the President's Office. Tables 2 and 3 below summarise some of these changes although they do not include all of the changes which took place during the first nine years of Zimbabwe's national independence.

¹¹ United Nations: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *A Handbook of Public Administration; Current Concepts and Practice with Special Reference to Developing Countries*; United Nations, New York, 1961, p 15.

TABLE 2

RELEGATION OF FORMER MINISTRIES TO DEPARTMENTS

MINISTRY OF: -	JOINED MINISTRY OF: -
Finance	Finance, Economic Planning & Development
Manpower Planning & Development	Labour, Manpower Planning & Development
Agriculture	Lands, Agriculture & Rural Resettlement
Works	Public Construction & National Housing
Roads & Road Traffic	Transport

TABLE 3

ADMINISTRATIVE REORGANISATION SINCE 1980

DEPARTMENT	MOVED FROM MINISTRY OF:-	TO MINISTRY OF: -
Power	Transport & Power	Energy, Water Res. & Develop.
Water Dev.	Natural Resources & Water Dev.	Energy, Water Res. & Develop.
Culture	Education & Culture Youth, Sport and Culture	Youth, Sport & Culture Education & Culture (1990)
Energy Res.	Mines & Energy Res.	Energy, Water Res. & Development
Rural Dev.	Lands, Resettlement & Rural Development	Local Govt, Rural & Urban Develop.
Tourism.	Information & Tourism	Natural Resources & Tourism
Posts & Telecom.	Roads, Road Traffic & Telecommunications	Info., Posts & Telecommunications
Industry	Commerce & Industry Industry & Technlgy	Industry & Technlgy Commerce & Industry (1990)
Housing	Local Govt & Housing	Public Construction & National Housing

It was argued at the times of these re-organisations that the changes were necessary and served to rationalise and improve government activities. Following the 1984 changes, however, the then Prime Minister indicated that there had been some ministries and departments which had not been performing well.¹² Several of such ministries were placed in the Prime Minister's office for closer supervision.

One of the major weaknesses of the organisational structure of the Zimbabwe service is that of duplication of some and neglect of other functions among some ministries. Indeed, an internal report by the Management Services Division (MSD) of the Ministry of the Public Service notes:

The failure to produce a clear and detailed enough functional structure has resulted in duplication of functions by Government Ministries and Departments, which is probably the largest problem being experienced with structure. Some of the problems attendant to functional structure are the waste of resources and certain things not being done... the latter problem is a result of lack of clarity as to who should be doing what.¹³

In the face of ever-increasing financial constraints and the worsening economic crisis, such waste as noted above is unwarranted and counter-productive. Speaking while receiving the report of the Public Service Review Commission, the President alluded to some of these duplications and omissions by stating that he hoped that the Review Commission had also "looked into 'conflicts' among ministries, arising from common areas they [the ministries] dealt with".¹⁴ The MSD document further states that the current procedure for creating new structures is faulty and leads to lack of clarity and a few other problems:

The procedure which has generally been followed... has been that once a need has been agreed upon, a skeleton structure, including the post to head the organisation, has been created to work out the terms of reference and work with Management Services Division in determining a structure. The problem with this approach has been that if, subsequently, it is established that there is no need for a new organisation as the proposed functions can be performed by existing Ministries/Departments, or that the grading of the proposed organisation is too high, it becomes difficult to abolish the skeletal structure or downgrade posts, as people in posts will

¹² *The Herald*, Harare, 18 January, 1984.

¹³ Ministry of the Public Service, internal report of the Management Services Division.

¹⁴ *The Herald*, Harare, May 30, 1989. That Report has not yet been released for public use at the time of writing.

fight hard to resist this. Cases in point have been the creation of the Department of Technology in the Ministry of Industry and Technology, and also the Accountant General's Department in the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development.¹⁵

These problems often become difficult to resolve because of the political implications they have. That political considerations often dictate the nature of things in the national administration is an established fact. 'Empire building' is not the preserve of practising politicians alone; indeed, some of the most active empire builders are public servants. There is need to undertake meaningful feasibility studies before the creation of any new structures is carried out. With regard to the Zimbabwe Public Service, the internal document cited above further notes:

... if... feasibility studies had been carried out, Management Services Division would have recommended that the functions being carried out by the Ministries of Youth, Sport and Culture, Community Development and Women's Affairs, and Cooperative Development be brought under one Ministry of Community Development as basically they are dealing with the same community and the main emphasis is self-reliance. Such an arrangement would do away with the duplication of functions which is being experienced, particularly at grassroots level; i.e. at district level, among field staff.¹⁶

Recent changes have resulted in Co-operatives being moved into the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs, while the Department of Women's Affairs is being moved, together with Youth, into the Ministry of Political Affairs. There seems to be no end to the changes all of which are, nevertheless, peripheral and of little significance in relation to efficiency and effectiveness of the administration. The most notable feature of all these reshuffles is the fact that none of them resulted in the emergence of a smaller public service than was created at independence. If anything, and as the figures in Table 1 confirm, the Administration has continued to get larger and more costly to the nation.

Other changes

In addition to the various structural and organisational changes discussed above, there have also been a few other changes in the

¹⁵ Ministry of the Public Service; MSD internal report.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

public service which warrant, at least, brief mention. First, there have been a few changes in the public service regulations, particularly those governing the terms and conditions of service and disciplinary procedures affecting public servants. However, regulation amendments have also tended to be peripheral, there has not been a significant departure from the British model of public administration. For example, the Zimbabwe Government has relaxed the regulations on the political neutrality of public servants; and, although partisan and active participation in politics is still prohibited, the new regulations permit a public servant to:

- vote at parliamentary and local authority elections or referenda;
- perform the duties of a returning officer (during elections);
- with the prior approval of the (Public Service) Commission, stand as a candidate for election as a member, or participate in the administration, of a local authority;
- ask questions at a political meeting
 - held with approval of the Commission, and,
 - at which attendance is confined to state employees;
- contribute financial support to a political party, organisation or movement;
- explain Government policy in the course of his duties if, in so doing, he avoids the expression of any personnel opinion in regard to such explanation.¹⁷

In spite of these changes, public servants in Zimbabwe have largely remained 'apolitical' in outlook and operational approach. Montgomery, writing about the functions of permanent secretaries in nine Southern African countries, including Zimbabwe, observes:

Close examination of the day-to-day activities of permanent secretaries in Southern Africa shows, however, that although political loyalty may be more important than political neutrality so far as politicians are concerned, political partisanship does not

¹⁷ Public Service, Conditions of Service for Employees (Amendment) Regulations, 1982.

rank very high among the functions of permanent secretaries in that part of the world.¹⁸

Political neutrality thus remains an official virtue for most public servants in Zimbabwe. Recent changes in disciplinary regulations have, however, jolted elements within the public service and made them realise that there is more to participation in political processes than they had assumed. The passing of Instrument 111, by the lower House of Parliament, after it had been thrown out by the Senate as a violation of public servants' basic human rights, indicated to public servants that they need to become involved in national political processes than they had been before.

Another change which has been made by the government to the inherited structure is the creation of the Office of the Ombudsman in 1982. Although this office is tasked with investigations into unfair treatment and malpractice by public authorities, it has not been of any significance because of the limitations placed upon it by the Act which created it. Most notable of these constraints is the fact that the Ombudsman has no enforcement authority; the recommendations made by this office can therefore be easily ignored. Besides, the Ombudsman's Office has no jurisdiction to investigate several bodies and authorities such as the President's Office, the Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, the police and the army.

With regard to decentralisation, the government has created the positions of provincial governors. This was in accordance with the Prime Minister's Directive on Decentralisation of 1984. The Directive defined the provincial governor as: "... the senior representative of Central Government at provincial level".¹⁹ The provincial governor has "political, consultative, developmental and co-ordinative..." functions.²⁰ All provincial governors are members of the Senate as well.

The major weakness of this new structure lies in the fact that virtually all of the functions performed by the incumbents are also performed by the provincial administrator. In fact, the relationship between the two is not adequately clear. To all intents and purposes, the provincial largely ends up doing only the ceremonial aspects of his functions. Indeed, most provincial based ministry

¹⁸ John D. Montgomery, "Life at the Apex", p. 211.

¹⁹ Zimbabwe Government, "Prime Minister's Directive on Decentralisation", Harare 1984.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

offices find it more worth their while to communicate with their head offices in Harare than with their provincial governors.

At the grassroots level, government has created, in each of the fifty-five districts, district development committees, ward development committees and village development committees. These structures are supposed to be organisational units for beneficiary participation in development. They are, therefore, expected to make inputs into development planning and implementation processes. These inputs are supposed to be taken into consideration at the Provincial and Central levels when development planning and implementation exercises are undertaken.

Since their creation in 1985, however, there is little evidence of their inputs having been taken into account. It is a truism that central organisations only cater for the inputs of lower level organisations and structures when and if such inputs do not conflict with the initiatives, policies, decisions and interests originating from the top. It must be stated that although the lower structures mentioned above do not constitute part of the public service in terms of salaries and other costs, each of them is "serviced" by field officers who are based in the district or provincial offices. This certainly constitutes further costs to the nation, at least in terms of salaries and other benefits that public servants are entitled to.

Indicators of administrative incapacity

One of the most difficult tasks of any exposition is that of determining or identifying appropriate indicators for what is being claimed. This paper has argued that there is administrative incapacity in the Zimbabwe Public Service. The purpose of this section is, therefore, to isolate selected factors or situations which confirm the existence of this incapacity. It is hoped to do this within the context of the economic crisis which Zimbabwe, like many other countries, is currently experiencing.

Perhaps the first indicator which should be noted is the creation of the Ombudsman's Office. The number of complaints this Office received in 1985, for example, is more than double the number received during the first year of its operation, 1983, as Table 4 indicates. Although several factors come into play in determining the number of reported cases, it is a fair assumption to state that the increased activity of this office is evidence of all not being well in the

operations of the administration in relation to its publics and employees.

TABLE 4
COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE
JANUARY 1983 - DECEMBER 1986

MONTH	1983	1984	1985	1986
January	29	54	91	102
February	4	75	99	71
March	9	46	75	50
April	20	51	59	66
May	41	60	78	59
June	30	47	69	73
July	43	57	60	90
August	37	77	68	65
September	33	51	91	65
October	32	61	75	80
November	81	50	73	53
December	55	67	65	45
TOTALS	414	696	893	819

Compiled from Ombudsman's Reports

Perhaps the second indicator of administrative incapacity can be the pronouncements of politicians. There have, indeed, been a number of criticisms levelled at public servants by politicians in the House of Assembly. Politicians have generally complained about the low level of efficiency that is displayed by some public servants, particularly in relation to the handling of public funds. For example, the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee has, year in and year out, identified several ministries whose financial management has cost the nation literally millions of dollars without adequate proof of compensation of any kind.

Some of the problems of financial management within government have been attributed to the problem of manpower drift from government service into private enterprises. Low salaries and poor working conditions have been blamed for this drift. Since independence, government has sought to reduce the gap between the highly paid people and the low wage-earners in all sectors of the economy. This has contributed to the drift into the private sector where, in addition to significantly higher salaries, individuals are

also offered various kinds of fringe benefits. The economic crisis has contributed to this whole situation in the sense that there are shortages of all sorts of commodities and 'status goods', notably vehicles. Private companies have, thus, been able to make use offers of company vehicles to competent people who agree to work for them. In the face of the economic crises, the manpower drift has therefore escalated.

Indeed, as long back as 1983, during debate on one of the many reports of the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee, a Member of Parliament observed:

This is yet another example of Government's inability to retain top-grade staff, because of lack of financial inducement... we employ so many low-grade civil servants, that we are unable to pay the high-grade ones sufficient salaries to keep them in the civil service.²¹

The same sentiments were expressed by another Member of Parliament, contributing to debate on yet another Public Accounts Committee Report:

I believe this sorry tale of incompetence, mismanagement and corruption which is being stated by this Report does not apply across the board in the civil services. There are many honest, hard-working men in the civil service who give this country a good service. But unfortunately, there are always those rotten apples in the barrel which cause problems. This is a tale that has become all too common - a report of this kind.²²

This quotation raises the issue of corruption in the public service. Recent developments in Zimbabwe have, however, proved that corruption is rife in high circles in both the public and private sectors. Indeed, the situation in the public service became so disturbing that in 1985 Parliament passed the Prevention of Corruption Act in an attempt to curb corrupt practices among public servants. Section 4 of this Act states:

If a public officer, in the course of his employment as such

- (a) does anything that is contrary to or inconsistent with his duty as a public officer;
- (b) omits to do anything which it is his duty as a public officer to do;

²¹ Parliament of Zimbabwe, *Parliamentary Reports*, Vol. 8, No. 1 30 August, 1983.

²² *Ibid.*, Vol. 12, No. 27, 28 November, 1985. Incidentally, this debate was on a different ministry from the one which had been under discussion in the 1983 Report.

for the purpose of showing favour or disfavour to any person, he shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding three hundred dollars, or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding three years, or to both such fine and such imprisonment.²³

Several people have since been convicted in accordance with this Act, including Zimbabwe's first black Commissioner of Police and two of his deputies. Recent developments, however, indicate that the Prevention of Corruption Act has not necessarily been successful in deterring public servants and private citizens from corrupt practices. Comments such as the two cited above reflect a bureaucracy hardly capable of effectively managing the affairs of the nation. Given the state of economic crisis, these numerous instances of corruption and financial mismanagement constitute a heavy burden on the nation as well as retard socio-economic development.

The third indicator of administrative incapacity is, perhaps, the government itself. In relation to both the issues of mismanagement and corruption, the then Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, while opening the Public Service Association Annual General Meeting in 1985 observed and cautioned:

During the course of the last five years, various negative features have emerged in the public service. We are well aware of these features and continue to take action against them. These include the extent to which inexperience has adversely affected the quality of performance of officers, and instances of financial maladministration and corruption which have had great publicity... Any form of maladministration is unacceptable and it has been Government's policy to ensure that all such cases are fully exposed and dealt with to the fullest extent of the law and relevant regulations, where they are established... However, let me warn those who are inclined to bend and even break all rules in order to enrich themselves at the expense of the State and the people at large, that we shall give them no quarter, and shall be quite ruthless with them.²⁴

This is, indeed, a strong statement coming, as it does, from the National Executive, and from the man who has overall responsibility for the public service as a whole. The statement, however, does not quite address all the causes of maladministration in the public service. Inexperience is not the only reason why

²³ Zimbabwe, Prevention of Corruption Act (1985); Section 4.

²⁴ Zimbabwe, Department of Information, "PM opens Public Service Association Annual General Meeting"; Press Statement, September, 1985.

maladministration and corruption are rampant in the public service. Other causes may, perhaps be proffered.

First, as noted earlier, the expansion of the public service after independence has led to an increase in the number of structures and established posts across the board. This, in turn, has resulted in oversized organisations, weak accountability systems, and general clumsiness in the public service. Expansion of the public service has also resulted in excessive, and sometimes unnecessary, departmentalisation with crude forms of "specialisation", thereby negating the integration of the various administrative processes. The large numbers of officers has also meant that supervision of junior officers by seniors has been lax and inadequate. Absenteeism and truancy are rife at both the central and provincial levels of government.

Second, the waiving of public service advancement procedures and regulations resulted in the entry of considerably young Zimbabweans, most of them in their early thirties. These young people are frustrated when they realise that those other young people above them in the hierarchy are likely to be around for the next twenty or more years. The present organisational structure further ensures that vertical communication and lines of command are followed at all times, while horizontal interaction is minimised. Present structures, like all colonial structures, are necessarily authoritarian rather than democratic or promotive of consultation with lower levels of the organisation.

Further, the current structure has led to serious bottle-necks in career advancement of public servants. The worst affected level is the Senior Administrative Officer (SAO) level, from which an officer can be promoted to Assistant Secretary level. Promotion into this and other higher grades is subject to availability of vacancies in the public service. The long periods SAOs have stayed at this level due to unavailability of vacancies significantly contributes to frustration, low morale and inefficiency in the public service.

A further factor contributing to the low morale among public servants are the low salaries and unattractive working conditions. The economic crisis which the country is experiencing has resulted in a high cost of living and diminishing purchasing power of the dollar. The limited and not-so-attractive incentive schemes and low salaries combine to produce a frustrated, corruption-prone public servant who has long lost the patriotic zeal. Indeed, as long ago as 1984, government had realised this negative effect of the economic

crisis on the calibre of the public servants it could attract and retain. At that time government offered a 15% non-taxable "critical shortage allowance" to those public servants who were considered to possess essential skills which the government needed.

In recognition of the administrative incapacity which is besetting the public service, central government has taken several steps to alleviate the problems and improve competence in the public service. For example, government has strongly emphasised the need for training of public servants. To that end, a number of training institutions have been created. Secondly, the President in 1987 appointed a Public Service Review Commission whose terms of reference included:

- to examine structures and functions of ministries and make recommendations for their effectiveness and efficiency;
- to examine staff deployment, development, promotion, remuneration and conditions of service and make recommendations;
- to make recommendations with regard of utilisation of both human and financial resources and promotion procedures;
- to examine the relationship between grade responsibility and remuneration as well as the career prospects in the various staff categories.²⁵

The Commission has submitted its report but the government has not yet made a decision on the recommendations. It is, however, doubtful that there will be significant administrative reforms as a result of the work of the Review Commission. It is worth noting, however, the comments made by the President on the occasion of the submission of the Review Commission's Report in May 1989. The President indicated that he is "... disenchanted at bureaucratic delays and loafing in the public service and the system's inability to yield decisions quickly.²⁶ The President also hoped that the Commission had addressed itself to the problems of "conflicts" among Ministries as a result of similar functions; absence of

²⁵ *The Herald*, Harare, May 30, 1989.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

performance among public servants; and inadequate supervision of staff in the public service.²⁷

Conclusion

The economic crisis which Zimbabwe is currently experiencing has had serious implications for the administrative system. There have been peripheral changes to the inherited colonial administrative system and its structures. These changes have not resulted in a more efficient and effective administrative system. Rather, the changes have resulted in the creation of a complex, hierarchical organisation which has largely been exceedingly costly, clumsy and inefficient in its operations.

Changes in the complexion of the public administration has not resulted in the creation of a more open and responsive organisation. The lack of adequately manpower to run a somewhat complex economy under crisis conditions have further complicated the problem. Corruption and incompetence in high places have drained the economy of much needed and scarce resources and demoralised the public. Measures to rectify the situation have largely been unsuccessful since, and will continue to be of dubious utility as long as the status quo is viewed to be protective of and enhancing the interests of the ruling class and its international benefactors.

²⁷ Ibid.