

Growth of a Bureaucracy

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The Planning Commission : A Descriptive Account by H K Paranjape; The Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi; pp ix : 216; price Rs 5.

NORTHCOTE Parkinson's well known equation shows the rate at which an organisation inevitably grows. The equation is $x = 100 (2km + 1)\%$,

where k is the number of staff seeking promotion through the appointment of subordinates; l is the difference between the ages of appointment and retirement; m is the number of man-hours devoted to answering minutes within the department; n is the number of effective units being administered; y is the total staff; and x is the percentage increase of staff per year. This rate, Parkinson is sure, "would invariably prove to be between 5.17 per cent and 6.56 per cent, irrespective of any variation in the amount of work (if any) to be done". Applying this formula to the Planning Commission which had a staff of 584 persons (186 higher categories plus 398 lower categories) in 1955-56, the figure for staff, calculated at Parkinson's higher rate of growth, should have been 9/0 (310 plus 660) for 1963.64; actually, the Planning Commission had a staff of 1,025 (297 plus 728) towards the end of 1963!

Chapter IV of the book under review provides an interesting account of the biology of organisational growth of an official body. The Planning Commission was originally conceived as a compact expert body which would provide the driving force for India's economic growth (p 162). However, it could not withstand the urge, natural in India, to share in executive powers and, in the process, lost both its independence and its expertise. The beginnings of this process can be traced almost to the very first stages after the formation of the Planning Commission.

The first stage in the process was the inclusion of Ministers as members of the Commission, starting with C D Deshmukh, "not so much," as the author says, "because of any preconceived thinking about the necessary pattern of membership as because of *ad hoc* considerations" (p 15). There were three "minister-members" from 1951 to 1956, four since then, and the number has increased to five recently. As a *quid pro quo* perhaps, the author reports, the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission attends all meetings of the Economic Committee of the Cabinet (pp 32-33).

The second stage in this process was the common manning of secretarial personnel, beginning with the Cabinet Secretary who fell himself versatile (or idle) enough to double as Secretary to the Planning Commission, ostensibly because "the Secretary of the Commission being also the Cabinet Secretary was able to get the views of the Ministries and in his dual capacity could do things by way of discussion on difficult questions at official level at the meetings of Secretaries, etc," and, as if this was not enough, because "there was also some difficulty in getting a person who would make a good Secretary" (p 33). Evidently, the theory of the indispensability of civil servants is becoming more pervasive today, the way superannuated civil servants manage to hang on to all kinds of official positions. When this dual position was questioned by the Estimates Committee, the Government blandly replied that it accepted the principle underlying the Estimates Committee's views—but, of course, in India, principles are intended to be enunciated, not acted upon.

This concept of common personnel was carried from administrative matters to policy-thinking and policy-making through having the Chief Economic Adviser of the Ministry of Finance as also the Economic Adviser of the Commission a decision which must be considered to have been disastrous. According to Paranjape, "this development seems to have been partly fortuitous" (p 34) in the C D Deshmukh decided to carry 'the Chief of the Economics Division of the Commission to the Finance Ministry. This effectively stilled all debate on the relevance of Government's economic policy to problems of economic growth under planning, and helped to establish the Planning Commission as an arm of the executive machinery. Moreover, the Panel of Economists, set up in March 1955 (pp 75, 82-83), because of its composition and the vague nature of its working relationship with the Planning Commission, failed to provide the necessary correctives for economic policy and, thus, proved a flop.

The third stage in the process was the increasing association of the Planning Commission with executive decisions. The author refers to the growth of a convention to refer important

proposals in the economic field to the Commission and adds; "As a result of these developments, from the point of view of the Planning Commission and that of the executive organs both at the Union and the State levels, close understanding and co-ordination between them are required if they have to carry out their functions efficiently" (p 31). Earlier, the author justifies this on the ground that "it has been thought that in the Indian context, planning must have the closest connection with the administration if it is not to risk becoming a mere (?) academic exercise" (p 21).

In fact, this association has been, as it can only be, at the periphery of power—the Commission could never hope to influence decisions except by acquiescing in them. However, in India people love power, particularly if it can be had without responsibility. This was how the Development Wing (now the Department of Technical Development), originally intended to provide technical expertise, ended up as a dispenser of industrial licences. It was not unnatural for the Planning Commission to lose its prime function in the hope of obtaining illusive powers in executive decisions.

This was inherent also in the manning of the Commission and the division of functions among the members. Very few members brought a scientific approach to their work; the author, after describing the evolution of some portfolios, states: "This indicates that the distribution of subjects and Divisions among Members has not always been the result so much of a logical pattern as of historical developments and the special interests of Members" (P 29). Later (p 30) the author mentions a case where a portfolio was transferred in four months and another where this was done in three days.

An organisation chart, appended to the book, shows the Planning Commission as having 13 members (including the Chairman) and 17 division heads (all with esoteric designations). The description of the organisation of the Commission, given by the author in Chapter IV shows how bureaucratic considerations came to swamp the functional aspects of the Commission's work. The author states, "It was recognised that if officers" of the status of

Under Secretaries are placed *In* charge of different Divisions or Sections, it will not be possible to get in each Branch the quality required, and it was therefore, decided that the Divisions of the Commission should be placed each under a Chief of Division supported by an Assistant Chief" (p 60). Later, the author refers to how, with increasing personnel, it became necessary to increase staff at the top "owing to limitation regarding span *vi* control" "Gradually in this manner a system came to be built up under which a hierarchical level between (the Heads of Divisions and the Members was created . . ." (p 66).

The book is intended only to be a descriptive account of the Planning Commission. It has been produced at the suggestion, and with the co-operation, of the Planning Commission. The author sympathetically takes us through a lot of official jargon: members are referred to mostly not by name but by designation, and the author seriously discusses the factors governing the hierarchical status: "A question was raised whether officers put at this new level—group leaders and programme advisers—in the hierarchy should be called Joint Secretaries or should be given some other designation. It was pointed out that the term 'Joint Secretary' would give a correct description of the officers whose primary function would be to assist the Secretary of the Commission in managing his charge" (pp 66-67). He does not even refer to the criticism of Pandit Nehru on the attempt of the Planning Commission to duplicate the ministries and the designations in them. The author concludes: "It (the Commission) has evolved organisational devices and working processes whose object is to ensure that the different operating agencies are in various ways involved in the planning process. Because of its composition, especially the fact that the Prime Minister and some other senior Ministers have been its members, and also because of the approach, the expertise and the working methods developed by it, the Commission has acquired prestige and has built up for itself a position of influence in the machinery of State," (p 162). The consequences of this, however, for on the content and efficiency of planning have been wholly negative, and ultimately this is the standpoint from which the role of the Planning Commission must be judged.

Even this descriptive account indicates clearly the seeds which were to show up later in the failure of the Planning Commission. Behind all the

divisions and sections and so on, there was no clear vision of the functions the Planning Commission was to perform. And the setting up of panels—for example, the Economists, Panel and now the further confusion created by the Planning Council—is no substitute for solid groundwork by staff. It is easy to find people who are eager to tag on memberships of committees and panels to their names, but the results achieved have still to provide justification for their formation. In addition, the Planning Commission has been

used to park some useless ministry officials and has, in its turn, been used as the jumping board for executive positions.

To-day the Planning Commission has become a body in search of its identity. The author's is a studious, painstaking study of the formation and growth of this body; except for a few laudatory remarks, the book provides mainly factual material. It provides an interesting inside view of the evolution of planning organisation in India and of how the plans are framed.



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