

CHAPTER 2

A CAREER PUBLIC SERVICE

AS A public servant, then, you are a member of a large service which mans the Singapore Administration.

Every civilised country has developed some form of government, together with public servants to help carry on the work of the state. In ancient Egypt, China and Rome, for example, there were mature and highly organised civil services, and all modern states are directed by governments, advised and helped by a civil service.

In the past, the appointment of civil servants was the personal prerogative of patrons. To begin with the patron was the head of state or his immediate circle of friends—in the United Kingdom, the King and his nobles. After 1689 in the United Kingdom, this prerogative of appointment passed into the hands of the newly formed cabinet. Later as parliamentary government continued to evolve, patronage of civil service appointments became the prerogative of the majority side of Parliament. Such a system of appointment by family or political influence often resulted in corruption, incompetence and lack of continuity.

From the Reform Act of 1832, the character of parliamentary government began to change. The extension of the vote and greater popular representation gave a new bias to the administration of government. Good government, from being the enforcement of law and the levying of taxes according to the requirements of a privileged minority, became the instrument to carry out the more constructive operations which would satisfy the social needs of the majority. The functions of government, once comparatively simple, became complicated and incompetence and corruption could not be tolerated.

It was becoming clear that the Administration required a staff or civil service, which was of good quality, which would carry out the policies expressed by the parliamentary representatives of the people and which could maintain the administrative machinery in good working order at all times so that there would be no breakdown in the everyday life of the people when there was any violent change of opinion expressed in the popular franchise.

In 1855, the recommendations of the Northcote-Trevelyan Commission were accepted and the English Civil Service Commission was set up as a central examining and recruiting agency. The principle of open competitive examinations was accepted in 1870 and since then the idea of a Commission which is able, independently of all persons