

## CHAPTER 7

### THE TRADITION OF PUBLIC SERVICE

LEGALLY a public servant serves the Queen. In practice, this means he serves the Minister in charge of his department, and through him the Council of Ministers, which is the Executive Government in Singapore. The Ministers comprising this Government are responsible to the Legislative Assembly; through them we serve the Legislative Assembly and so, the whole community.

This chain of responsibility should never be forgotten. Governments come and go, but the Public Service remains, and it is the particular task of the Public Service to serve the government of the day while conserving the continuing interests of the Colony and the community.

The function of your final superior, the Permanent Head of the Ministry, is to render assistance to his Minister in the formulating of policy and in executing the will of the Legislative Assembly. The permanent head of a Department is responsible for its general working, and for all the business thereof, and advises the Minister in all matters relating to the Department. The permanent heads, and through them the Public Service, participate in the formation of policy by studying all the factors that bear on policy. The permanent head organises, manages and controls his department in the executing and administering of policies adopted by the Minister, the Council of Ministers or the Legislative Assembly. For instance, when the Legislative Assembly passes an Ordinance saying that certain benefits are to be made available to certain classes of persons, the responsible Minister, assisted by his departments, has to make detailed regulations about the conditions on which the benefits are to be granted; and offices have to be set up as required to receive applications for benefits and to ensure that the regulations are properly applied to individual cases.

*Relationship to Ministers.*—The elected representatives of the people, as Ministers or as members of the Legislative Assembly, settle the broad lines of policy on which Singapore is to be governed. The Minister holds office because he belongs to the dominant party or group of parties in the Legislative Assembly, from which the government has been formed. He must be able to give an account to the Legislative Assembly of what his department has done on any matter; and by firm parliamentary practice, the Minister is precluded from blaming any public servant if things go wrong. The responsibility is his. Responsible representative government means that the elected representatives are responsible to the electors; ministerial responsibility means that each Minister is individually responsible to the Legislative Assembly for his own and his department's executive or administrative actions. (Co-