

Upgrading the Philippine Civil Service —(2)

CELERINA G. GOTLADERA*

As a result of almost two decades of misrule, the Philippine bureaucracy is plagued with deep-seated problems in morale, discipline and defective merit system. Urgent reforms are thus necessary in order to assure that the state's civil service can become an important factor in the nation's drive for socio-economic development. The Civil Service Commission (CSC) intends to upgrade the civil service through the following measures: (1) reduction in force; (2) professionalization of the civil service; (3) rationalization of the compensation scheme to attract and retain the brightest and the best people in the civil service; (4) decentralization of personnel functions to the heads of ministries and agencies; and, (5) institutionalization of safeguards and sanctions to insure observance of the merit principle as well as adoption of policies and programs that will enhance its effective implementation.

The recent dramatic developments in the political life of our country have underscored the significance of the role of the civil service as a guarantor to the stability of the government and the nation. Despite the past administration's misgovernance and the consequent economic and political chaos it brought about, the men and women in the state bureaucracy held steadfast in their work and quietly paved the way for the new order.

Much has really been said and written about the ills of the past administration that led to its rejection by the people in that 1986 February revolution. So overwhelming was its pernicious influence that the civil service was not spared from degradation despite the valiant efforts of well-meaning civil service career officials.

Legislations which could have provided the impetus for progressive public personnel administration like the liberal latitude of discretion accorded to appointing authorities were used to subvert the merit system instead. In many instances, ethical standards were cast aside and public accountability ignored.

Thus, morale and discipline of the career officials and employees suffered together with the efficiency and effectiveness of the bureaucracy in the delivery of public services.

*Acting Chairperson, Civil Service Commission (CSC)

President Corazon C. Aquino fully comprehends the problem. In a speech before businessmen during the electoral campaign, she said:

"I want to see again in the Philippine bureaucracy the qualities for which it was renowned: honesty, competence, helpfulness and humility. I want our civil servants to have again a sense of pride in government service. I want government to be as attractive as the private sector to the brightest and best of our people."

And now as the new government moves to save the nation from the clutches of the repressive traces of the past economic, political and other forces, it stands to draw up a blueprint for the reformation and professionalization of the civil service.

Undoubtedly, reforms have to be instituted to weed out from the service the incompetent, the inept and the corrupt, and at the same time to attract and retain the most competent and the best qualified. And considering the present conditions, such reforms will certainly reduce the size of the bureaucracy which has unreasonably increased as a result of mismanagement of the past regime.

The agenda for upgrading the civil service which the CSC envisions to pursue under the new government consists of short-term and long-term programs designed to reform and professionalize the civil service.

Reforms

Urgently needed reforms must be instituted to weed out from the service people who, by commission or omission, have betrayed the people's trust. Section 2, Article III of the Freedom Constitution facilitates such a cleansing process. The cleansing process should, however, proceed with caution and objectivity. After all, there are many government employees who performed creditably during the dark days of the past administration and who refused to violate their oath of office in spite of the blandishments and threats of use of power. One does not rid the house of termites by burning it down.

Therefore, to insure that the removal will not be arbitrary and that injustice is not committed against those who have served the country faithfully and satisfactorily, the President has deemed it wise to issue Executive Order No. 17 governing the removal or replacement of personnel. The recent decision of the review committee, created under this mandate, ordering the reinstatement of some employees who appealed their cases is already an encouraging sign that the present leadership will leave no stone unturned when it comes to the plight of the lowly civil servants.

Reduction in Force. The size of the bureaucracy has unreasonably increased. Reorganization of the machinery has to be done and reduction of its

size is inevitable. To cushion the impact of reorganization, the possibility of carrying out the reduction in force by phases has been considered. Also, the rules governing the evaluation of personnel so that the most competent and best qualified are retained in the service are being drafted. The CSC is ready on call to assist agencies in this regard.

And for permanent employees who might have been displaced due to reorganization, the Commission intends to put up an Employment List and refer this to agencies which are in the process of recruiting people. Along this line, the Commission will reiterate its key role in the civil service position classification function for the state bureaucracy.

Professionalization of the Civil Service. Once the removal of the misfits and the reduction in force are completed, it can be expected that the bureaucracy will be of manageable size. The task on hand then is to make the civil service efficient and effective.

Plans to professionalize the civil service include the following:

Rationalization of the compensation scheme to attract and retain the brightest and the best people in the civil service. For as long as the salaries are not commensurate with the quality of service required, the civil service will be able to attract only the mediocre, the opportunist, and the masochists. It is ironic to note that we cannot rid the service of deadwoods nor retain achievers.

Decentralization of personnel functions to heads of ministries and agencies. The Civil Service Commission intends to delegate authority to heads of ministries and agencies to act on personnel matters to underline the fact that personnel management is a line responsibility. By relinquishing its control functions and making agency heads responsible for their personnel management decisions, the Commission shall cease to be the 'whipping boy' for all the ills in the civil service. The Commission though shall retain its authority to make rules, formulate policies, set standards, audit exercise of delegated authority and review appealed decisions on disciplinary and non-disciplinary cases.

Institutionalization of safeguards and sanctions to insure observance of the merit principle in all aspects of personnel management. While ministers and heads of agencies are expected to responsibly exercise the authority given them as the Commission continues to decentralize its personnel functions, there is a need to insure proper exercise of that authority. For this purpose, the creation of an office of inspection and audit in the Commission has been recommended. The skills of the Commission's personnel will necessarily shift from processing to personnel auditing.

Also, the Commission believes it should delegate its functions on personnel discipline to its regional offices, depending upon the gravity of the

offense in question. With reference to the relation between the Merit Systems Board (MSB) and the Commission Proper in so far as decisions are concerned, it has to be made clear that the decision of the MSB is final if the case of the verdict is not dismissal; if it is, then the Commission Proper can act, on appeal.

Adoption of policies and program that will enhance the effective implementation of the merit principle. To this end, the Commission intends to pursue the following directions:

(1) In the area of recruitment, agencies will be allowed to conduct examinations for positions peculiar to these agencies and qualifications and such examinations will be considered a civil service eligibility provided, the standards of the Commission are fully met.

The Commission is looking into the possibility of adopting the one-examination concept wherein an individual takes only one examination for his entry into the government service and his movement by promotion and other personnel action will depend only on other factors and other assessment schemes. Such examinations should be made common to heterogeneous groups at varied horizontal and vertical levels. For example, for a test of 200 items to be given to a heterogeneous group, the high school graduate will answer only 100, the college graduate 150 and the graduate level all of the 200 items.

Geographic areas where there is dearth of civil service eligibles will be determined and examinations will be conducted in these areas by the Commission.

To attract the best products of colleges and universities of good standing, the Commission will draw and execute a campus recruitment program in coordination with the heads of these college and universities and the top officials of our educational institutions. Behind this program is a strong argument that the Philippine civil service system as the biggest end-user of the product of our educational system and the biggest employer of the country deserve to get the best and most qualified into its fold. To deserving honor graduates, the Commission will confer a special kind of eligibility that they will be truly proud of.

On job placement of civil service eligibles the Commission will require all agencies to submit vacancies to be filled by certification. It will adopt measures to insure that this area of concern is duly given attention and highlighted. Such measure will include a continuous monitoring and updating of the records of civil service eligibles.

(2) The importance of the probationary period, particularly in the original appointment, will be stressed. It is believed that no new employee

should be given outright original permanent appointment unless he has satisfactorily completed the probationary period. The probationary period serves as a test for his true fitness in the government service. During this period, he is closely observed by his immediate supervisor and his performance periodically reported. After the successful six-month period, and upon the recommendation of his agency head, the Commission can now mark his appointment paper "permanent."

Entry into the government service should be made solemn by means of a ritual oath-taking before the head of the agency and preferably in the presence of his immediate supervisor and family members. The rite will surely leave an indelible mark in his memory that being a civil servant is an honored position. The pledge or the oath must be reaffirmed each time the employee is promoted, transferred or reinstated.

(3) Performance will be underscored in promotion policies. To adopt to existing socio-cultural, technological and governmental conditions, agencies will be authorized to develop their own employee performance evaluation system provided such a system is able to distinguish the achievers from the non-achievers.

(4) The meaning of security of tenure will be clarified. There is need to reexamine the tenural system where people seem to equate civil service eligibility with security of tenure. It must be understood that civil service eligibility is a prerequisite to permanent appointment only while satisfactory performance and good behavior are the *sine qua non* to security of tenure. This is also the rationale behind the Commission's move to design a rational scheme on the probationary period of new government employees.

Under study at present is a new mode of tenure where an employee's performance and past behavior are subject to periodic review to determine whether the employee shall be extended another tenure or not.

(5) The human resource development programs will be rationalized. Responsibility of training institutions will be delineated to prevent overlapping. At the same time, a manpower program will be prepared to determine skills and personnel requirements which must be addressed to training institutions. For the development of the leadership and administrative skills of the local government officials especially the Officers-in-Charge, the Commission's thirteen regional offices are conducting training programs on personnel management.

Corollary to all these, an impact assessment of training programs shall be conducted to determine which programs to continue, revise or discontinue.

To give differential treatment to government corporations to make them more competitive with their private counterpart, the Commission

envisions to draw up a more realistic and comprehensive program of action to meet demands and expectations. It has started initial activities that will eventually lead to the creation and establishment of the Office of Corporate Affairs in the Commission.

(6) The Commission through a rationalized development information and public relations program will consistently inform and educate the people about its commitments, policies, plans, programs, projects and activities with the utilization of the different channels and technologies of communication, including the print and broadcast media.

(7) The Commission will consult its publics regularly. These publics include the governmental policymakers, government ministry heads and officials of other agencies and instrumentalities, officers of government employee associations and federations, heads of educational institutions and key people in our educational system, governmental personnel officers, heads of personnel departments, divisions, sections or units, training officers, members of honor societies of colleges and universities, mass media people, church clergy, community leaders and the general public. The manner and procedure of consultation will depend upon the issue to be discussed, the nature of the group to be consulted and the objective of the consultation.

People power will be institutionalized in the rule making and policy formulation of the Commission. Dialogues with line agencies through the Consultative Council on Personnel Management and with representatives of employee associations will be maintained.

A new issue getting public support nowadays is the right of government employees to organize themselves which we in the Commission openly support for as long as they work not only for their benefit but also for the civil service system. The issue, though, on their right to strike remains to be debated in terms of its effect on the government's machinery.

The Commission will also build up strong ties and linkages with professional associations like the Philippine Society for Public Administration and the Association of Schools on Public Administration and with institutions like the Development Academy of the Philippines and the UP College of Public Administration which can offer their professional services particularly on personnel research and development.

As a final note, the Constitutional Commission has approved on third reading the provisions on civil service which among others vest the Civil Service Commission ample powers to enforce the decisions and rulings and enjoy fiscal autonomy. These wider latitude of authority befitting an independent constitutional body will soon obtain legitimacy through the voice of the constitutional authorities and the people.

It is now more than ever that efforts should be drawn and integrated to lift the civil service to greater heights. National social, economic and political recovery can be accelerated with the support of an efficient, honest and dedicated government workforce.