



# Public Administration in Sri Lanka: An Analysis of Evolution, Trends, and Challenges in Personnel Management

*I. Renuka Priyantha, W. K. Ranjith Dickwella  
and Ravindra Gunasekara*

From the beginning of the sixteenth century, Sri Lanka was colonized by three European nations—the Portuguese, Dutch, and the British. Being a British colony resulted in considerable socio-economic and politico-administrative outcomes. At present, the public service stands on a tripod: colonial legacies, local inventions, and components borrowed from global reform waves. This paper discusses the historical development of personnel management practices in the public service in Sri Lanka. It starts by presenting an overview of the development of the public

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I. R. Priyantha (✉)

Department of Public Policy, University of Ruhuna, Matara, Sri Lanka

W. K. R. Dickwella

Department of Political Science, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

R. Gunasekara

Department of Political Science, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Gangodawila, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka

service, then maps the nature of the public service with reference to the effects of reforms introduced by successive governments. The chapter's final sections analyse the challenges presented by politicized personnel management practices.

## ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE IN SRI LANKA

The modern bureaucracy of Sri Lanka is a by-product of British colonial rule, introduced to administer the country (Warnapala 1974). 12 October 1798 marked the beginning of the Ceylon Civil Service. This was when Frederick North assumed office as the governor general of the island, accompanied by a staff of eight. In September 1801, 24 staff members, recruited by the secretary of state in England, arrived to establish the nucleus of a 'covenanted' civil service (the 24 entered into a covenant promising faithfulness in their service) (Collins 1966). From its very beginning, the public service was strong and stable due to the experience and expertise of its members. They occupied key positions in the central government and ran the entire machinery of provincial administration. They played a dual role: as well as implementing policies, they also formulated them. According to Ekanayake (1985), some public servants were in the Executive Council and had the opportunity to influence all aspects of public policy.

Although constitutional developments from 1832 to 1921 reduced the significance of this dual role of the public service, it cannot be denied that for nearly a century, these public servants acted both as chief executors of government policy and as chief legislators. The constitutional developments, which primarily resulted in expanding the size and power of the Legislative Council, reflected flexibility in colonial attitudes and affected the administrative structure and its restructuring (Collins 1951).

Parallel to this development, the scope of public service expanded and a vast array of new administrative departments emerged. For instance, the Irrigation Department, the Public Works Department, and the Survey Department were established in 1889, the Forest Department in 1900, and the Department of Agriculture in 1912. This expansion of governmental activities led to the increased recruitment of personnel. In 1911, the number of civil servants was 5375, and by 1921 it had been increased to 7951 (Tambiah 1955). On the one hand, this indicates the expansion of the socio-economic responsibility of the state towards its

citizens. On the other hand, it gave opportunities to the local population to be widely represented in the bureaucracy. Sri Lankans occupied 12 and 32% of civil service positions in 1920 and 1925, respectively (Warnapala 1974). This marked the beginning of the gradual nationalization of the public service.

Constitutional reforms introduced by the British in 1921 and 1924 paved the way for turning the public service in a politicized direction. Hitherto, it had been accustomed to governing the country without any serious political interference; now, through being manipulated by political hands, it started to exercise a great deal of political influence (Collins 1951). Another major drawback of the constitutional reforms of 1924 was that the power and responsibility of politicians and administrators were divorced from each other. To remedy this ailment, the Donoughmore Constitution of 1931 merged the power and responsibility of the public service. It then became the duty of the public service to give effect to the policies of the executive committees. As Charles Collins explains: 'The Public Service now entered upon a change-over period, from a state of affairs where officials shape policy as well as carry it out, to one when their chief, concern is to give effect to the policy of the popularly elected Minister' (Collins 1951, p. 123).

This period of the Donoughmore Constitution inaugurated an era of social and economic change that affected the role of the public service. The new tasks of the government demanded changes in the administrative structure and an increase in personnel. Article 31 of this constitution provided the legal provision to establish the first ever Public Service Commission (PSC). Up to 1948, the governor, who was the sole agent of the colonial crown, had all responsibility for recruitment, promotion, and disciplinary matters within the public service. The most important change that the constitution of 1948 brought was the immediate adaptation of the public service to the changing economic and social development goals of the new political leadership. The unique contribution of the political system was that it provided the first intensive test in bureaucratic adaptation.

The Soulbury Constitution of 1948 further strengthened the PSC such that it could work with total independence while enjoying the executive power of recruitment, promotion, transfer, and disciplinary control of personnel. The power vested in the PSC stemmed from Article 160(1) of the constitution (Unantenne 1983). This provision aimed at ensuring the principles of impartiality and political neutrality amongst those working in public organizations. While under the political control of the

cabinet or the members of parliament, the PSC was supposed to ensure that political interference from these same politicians be brought to a minimal level.

The general election of 1956 brought S.W.R.D. Bandaranayake to power, and the aims and aspirations of his government were entirely different from those of the foregoing leaders who had held power for nearly a decade since independence. The new government introduced several radical reforms (Unantenne 1983).

One reform was to expand the size of bureaucracy by restructuring it. This was necessary on account of the Sinhala Only Act of 1956, which made the language of the majority community the official language. With the introduction of universal free education in 1945, education was extended to every nook and corner of the island. Thus, an educated Sinhala-speaking middle class with a predominantly rural background, nationalistic outlook, and a commitment to major social change began entering the public service at all levels (Unantenne 1983). Nevertheless, until the 1970s, the public service enjoyed a fair amount of autonomy from political involvement and interference as a result of the constitutional provisions made in the Soulbury Constitution enacted in 1948.

Table 9.1 shows the increase of personnel in the public service from 1911 to 2016. It shows that after independence in 1948, the number of personnel drastically increased. From 5375 personnel in 1911, the number increased to 876,395 in 2016. Significantly, in 1951 and 1968, there was a total of 159,174 new recruits.

The first Republican Constitution of 1972 made significant changes to the public service in Sri Lanka. It brought the country's entire administrative structure under the control of the cabinet of ministers. Article 106 (1) of the constitution stated that the cabinet ministers were responsible for the appointment, transfer, and disciplinary control of state officers—tasks which had thus far been performed by the independent PSC. Being vested with these responsibilities, the ministers were answerable to the National State Assembly. The provision of subjecting the affairs of public service to the political leadership marked the first-ever politicization of the service that had hitherto been governed by the independent commission established by the Soulbury Constitution (Country Study and Guide 1988). By replacing the PSC, the new constitution introduced two institutions for dealing with public service: the State Services Advisory Board (SSAB) and the State Service Disciplinary Board (SSDB).

**Table 9.1** Growth of the public service (1911–2016)

<i>Year</i>	<i>1911</i>	<i>1921</i>	<i>1931</i>	<i>1941</i>	<i>1951</i>	<i>1968</i>	<i>1972</i>	<i>1980</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2016</i>
No. of personnel	5375	7951	45,747	83,543	144,500	303,674	323,718	368,849	421,009	587,805	874,395

*Sources:* Warnapala (1974), Collins (1951): [www.statistics.gov.lk](http://www.statistics.gov.lk) (2016)

The main responsibility of these boards was to assist the cabinet in implementing its duties regarding the public service. And since the power wielded by these boards was only advisory, the ministers were not compelled to accept it or put it into practice.

The immediate impact of the constitution of 1972 on the public service came to expression in at least in three ways. First, it brought the bureaucracy, which until then had been protected from direct political interference, under the direct control of the cabinet and the National State Council. Second, it led to political considerations assuming the major role in managerial decisions that concerned the bureaucracy, contributing to an erosion of the political neutrality that had come to be the hallmark of the bureaucracy. Third, it led to gradual change in the behavioural culture of the bureaucracy itself—moving away from being a ‘public service’ to a ‘political party-appendage’ (Asian Development Bank 2004).

De Silva (1993, pp. 88–97) explains this overall evolutionary process of the Sri Lankan public service thus: ‘As politicians intervened in recruitment, offering jobs as patronage to followers, a politicized and overstuffed Public Service was no longer able to perform its role’.

The second Republican Constitution of 1978 re-established the PSC and gave it almost the same responsibilities as it had had before 1972 but subordinated it to the cabinet. Article 55 (2) further strengthened the political control over the public service by debarring the cabinet ministers from delegating their authority to the heads of departments.

On 3 October 2001, the PSC was upgraded to an independent commission, making it responsible only to the parliament. It implemented the depoliticization of the public service by making the discretionary power of political authorities subject to checks and balances. According to Article 55(1) of the constitution, the PSC was empowered to formulate rules, regulations, and procedures pertaining to the recruitment, promotion, transfer, and disciplinary action against public officers. However, by enacting the 18th amendment, the provisions of the 17th amendment were rescinded. The PSC’s power was brought back under the direct control of the cabinet, and the cabinet ministers were able to directly appoint the heads of departments. The 19th amendment, enacted on 15 May 2015, re-established the PSC as the body to oversee the administration of the public service. At present, it is believed that the PSC undertakes the all-important administrative responsibilities of managing public service personnel.

## NATURE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

By the late 1980s, the public sector employed about 25% of the working population (Country Study and Guide 1988). Even though the non-state sector represented a larger portion of employment, public sector jobs were still in high demand. This may be due to the better privileges of state employees, insurance benefits, or attitudes about public service that had lingered since colonial times (Gunawardana 1989). Before discussing this in detail, an overall understanding of the sector-wise composition and distribution of cadres is necessary.

In 2002, based on data released by the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) of Sri Lanka, the total number of employees was 835,650. This represented a ratio of 1 public servant for every 25 citizens, and it can be considered significant in the context of the developing world. The entire public sector—its main sub-sectors are the state sector, the provincial public sector, and semi-governmental organizations such as state-owned enterprises—recruits public servants to provide services for the public. In 2016, while the state sector, which is directly administered by the central government, had 492,280 employees (around 44% of the total civil servants), 382,115 persons were attached to the provincial public sector in nine Provincial Councils of the country. In the semi-governmental sector, there were 243,413 civil personnel (Department of Census and Statistics—Sri Lanka 2005). Table 9.2 illustrates this composition of the public sector.

The occupational distribution within the Sri Lankan public service also suggests another aspect of its bureaucratic hierarchies. There is quite a large top layer of professionals, technicians, associate professionals, clerks, and related workers. Nevertheless, the apex of the system consists of far fewer. In 2016, there were 480,000 senior officials, managers, and legislators at the top of the hierarchy. A considerable portion of the

**Table 9.2** Distribution of employees in state, provincial public, and semi-government sectors in 2016

<i>Sector</i>	<i>No. of employees</i>
State sector	492,280 (44%)
Provincial public sector	382,115 (34%)
Semi-government sector	243,413 (22%)

*Source* Census of Public and Semi Government Sector Employment—2016

public service consists of service and sales workers. Numerically, they represent more than 11.21%. While 6.5% of public servants were employed in professional-level positions such as teaching, health services, and postal services, another 4.04% worked in clerical and other parallel-grade posts in the public service. Table 9.3 shows more details of the distribution of public servants by major occupational segments.

As the administrative culture of the country shows, public officers have traditionally enjoyed a high degree of prestige and social status. This can go far in accounting for why government jobs have been the most preferred form of employment. Service in government has tended to be considered a career path, chosen for life and pursued until retirement with few opportunities of mid-career entry. The recruitment system attends closely to the educational system, and access to the higher civil service is restricted to those with higher education (Wijenayake 2000).

In the early civil service, the method of recruitment and promotion depended on a formal system of evaluating candidates' educational and professional qualifications. Performance-based education was considered a means for improving the personality and character of public servants, but also a tool for earning respect and trust amongst the population. Until 1854 recruitment was done on the basis of the Haileybury Entrance Examination. A system of open-competitive exams was introduced in 1856. In 1870, a system was initiated to hold exams simultaneously in Colombo and London (Warnapala 1995, p. 50). Meanwhile, the local candidates who were not recruited through examination were simply nominated by the governor but were still required to sit for a non-competitive exam.

As Table 9.4 shows, the compulsory and optional subjects of both types of exams stressed the importance of knowledge in several areas in order to carry out the functions of one's office. Although knowing local languages was prominently mentioned from the very beginning of the public service, the formula outlined above did not include it as a requirement. After 1822 proficiency in Sinhalese or Tamil became a necessary condition for promotion in the public service, regardless of how difficult they were to learn (Warnapala 1995).

In this context, the public servants became not only professional experts but also close observers of the indigenous lifestyle.



**Table 9.3** Employed persons by major occupational segments 2013–2016 ('000person)

Segment	2013		2014		2015		2016	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Managers, senior officials and legislators	365	4.75	34	0.46	480	6.13	480	6.04
Professionals	484	6.30	492	6.67	511	6.53	519	6.53
Technicians and associate professionals	448	5.83	450	6.10	471	6.01	485	6.10
Clarks and clerical support workers	281	3.66	327	4.43	311	3.97	321	4.04
Service and sales workers	847	11.03	903	12.23	853	10.89	891	11.21
Skilled agriculture, forestry and fishery workers	1490	19.40	1562	21.16	1457	18.61	1435	18.05
Craft & related trade workers	1302	16.95	1313	17.79	1266	16.17	1274	16.03
Plant & machine operators and assemblers	640	8.33	636	8.62	673	8.59	703	8.84
Elementary occupations	1773	23.09	1634	22.14	1767	22.56	1795	22.58
Armed forces occupations & unidentified occupations	50	0.65	30	0.41	41	0.52	44	0.55
Total employed	7680	100	7381	100	7831	100	7948	100

Source: Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey (Department of Census and Statistics)

**Table 9.4** Compulsory and optional subjects of the examinations (1833–1931)

<i>Non-competitive examination</i>	<i>Open-competitive examination</i>
<i>Compulsory subjects</i>	
1. English composition	1. Exercise designed to test handwriting and orthography
2. Accounts and bookkeeping	2. Arithmetic including vulgar and decimal fractions
3. Euclid books I–IV, and algebra	3. Latin and one of the following languages: Greek, French, Italian, or German
4. Geography	4. English composition including precise writing
<i>Optional subjects</i>	
1. Languages: Greek, Latin, French, German, Sanskrit	1. Pure and mixed mathematics
2. Modern history: British colonies and dependencies including India	2. Ancient or modern history and geography
3. Elements of constitutional and international law	3. Elements of constitutional and international law
4. Elements of political economy	4. Political economy
5. Civil engineering and surveying	5. Geology
	6. Civil engineering and surveying

Source Data extracted from W.A.W. Warnapala (1995). *Civil Service Administration in Ceylon: A Study in Bureaucratic Adaptation*. Colombo: University of Sri Jaywardenepura. pp. 49–51

They made significant discoveries about the customs, history, archaeology, languages, and literature of the island.<sup>1</sup>

## EARLY REFORMS OF THE PUBLIC PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The first significant public service reform was introduced in 1951 to improve organizational efficiency, recruitment, and training. Subsequent reforms took place in 1963, 1969, and 1972 to modernize administrative practices, while 1986 and 1994 were the most productive years for

<sup>1</sup>John D'Oyly, George Turnour, William Tolfrey, R.C. Childers, T.W. Rhys Davids, and others were experts in the local languages and Buddhist literature, while Joseph Joinville, Edgar Layard, W.E. Wait, J. Emerson Tennen, H.C.P. Bell, Leonard Woolf and others did significant research on the history and the tradition of ancient Ceylon (Collins 1966, pp. 445–446).

reforms overall. Most of the early reforms mainly aimed at introducing limited structural and functional adjustments; the reformers tinkered with the existing public service administration instead of instigating pinpointed or comprehensive changes (Wejeweera 1988). The 1960s and '70s was a period of transition, from the colonially patterned bureaucracy to independent Sri Lankan bureaucracy, with some significant changes being proposed even if they were not implemented until the 1980s.

In 1965, due to the increasingly poor performance of the public sector, the government that came to power created a number of institutions such as the Plan Implementation Committee and the Foreign Exchange Committee at the ministry level to improve quality, efficiency, and productivity. Deficiencies in public service performance prompted the appointment of a committee of secretaries to investigate and report on possible new financial regulations, tender procedures, and the organizational changes required in the context of development programmes (Nadarajah 1997).

The new government, which retained political power in 1971, created a separate ministry to administrate all public service affairs and matters. In 1972, the newly elected government promulgated the Republican Constitution which replaced the Soulbury Constitution of 1948. With this, the mechanisms of the Soulbury Constitution (i.e., the Independent Public Services Commission, the SSAB and State Services Discipline Board) to protect public service appointments, recruitment procedures, promotions, disciplinary action, and protection from political interference and influence were rescinded. The Republican Constitution assigned the cabinet of ministers the responsibility of appointing, transferring, dismissing, and disciplining state officers (Wijeweera 1988). It also provided that the decisions of the cabinet and of individual ministers who acted under delegated authority from the cabinet could not be questioned in a court of law. The subordination of the public service to the political authority transformed the independent public service to a politicized one. To give an example: Throughout the 1970s and the early '80s, on every occasion of recruiting teachers to the Department of Education, except in the case of science graduates whose supply was scarce, selections were based on the recommendations of politicians (De Silva 1993).

In the mid-1980s, three major events significantly affected the public service: the Provincial Councils were established, so also the Administrative Reform Committee (ARC), and the Restructuring

Management Unit (RMU) (Nadarajah 1997). The RMU was under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance and Planning (MFP) even though the functions legally belonged to the Ministry of Public Administration. The RMU was manned by some visiting expatriate and non-governmental personnel. It existed for four years. As Nadarajah explains, along with urging that immediate action be taken to reduce overstaffing, inefficiency, and poor productivity in the public services, the RMU made four recommendations:

- To formulate a national policy on training
- To establish new subnational institutions called Management Development and Training Units
- To develop a new policy for recruitment based on merit and examinations, thus to replace the patronage system
- To revitalize the Sri Lanka Institute of Development Administration (SLIDA), enabling it to play a proactive role in changing public administration through training and consultancy

Some of these recommendations were accepted and worked out by the government, for instance, to enhance SLIDA's capacity to train personnel, introduce new techniques, and provide consultancy services to the public service. But even by the end of the 1980s, no remarkable change took place in the public service. But, by the early 1990s, there was an urgent need for increased efficiency. The government that assumed power in 1994 identified the existing reality of public service and tried to change the situation by complying with the requirements of modern development activities. Before we proceed to discuss the steps that were taken to bring change to the public service, it is worth understanding the factors that triggered the introduction of New Public Management (NPM) techniques to enhance the productivity, efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of the public sector.

### NPM REFORMS AND THE PUBLIC SERVICE

Sri Lanka's public administration, at the time of independence in 1948, had some elements of good governance. It had a dedicated professional staff, a transparent regulatory system, and one of the lowest levels of corruption in South Asia. Through the course of the first 25 years, the public sector expanded to encompass publicly funded social welfare services,

poverty alleviation, and infrastructure through government agencies such as the Departments of Post and Telecommunication, the Road Development Authority, and so forth. State-owned enterprises were established to direct some sectors of the economy and to provide the key public goods and services.

Theoretically, the second Republican Constitution of 1978 was designed to apply neo-liberal changes to bring the country in line with what was happening elsewhere in the world. However, the administrative modifications necessary for the smooth progress of neo-liberal ideology were never introduced. Consequently, in 1994 NPM reforms were introduced mainly to overcome deficiencies in the public service and to bring the country's public administration in line with the global context.

But there is more to the background story for the NPM reforms. In 1986, President J.R. Jayawardanaas had appointed the ARC to carry out a comprehensive study of the public service. The ARC was tasked to identify the deficiencies and weaknesses and to make recommendations for how to overcome them. So the committee went ahead and identified three focal areas: the structure, the personnel system, and the work system and procedures (Administrative Reform Committee 1987, p. 4). Deficiencies in the personnel system related to the concept of representative bureaucracy. However, the ARC did not focus on this when it introduced reforms; instead, it acknowledged the overstaffing and insufficient salary and highlighted four major deficiencies and weaknesses:

- The problems in cadre management and the compensation structure in the public service
- The absence of a national training policy and the inadequacy of institutional arrangements in training and management development
- The lack of proper institutional mechanisms for carrying out the tasks of personnel management for a professional public service
- The absence of a scientifically and objectively selected multidisciplinary group of senior managers to provide leadership to the public service

The recommendations for how to overcome these problems were not put into operation until the early 1990s due to politico-administrative disturbances. In 1994, with the change in government, certain discussions were held regarding public administration reforms. As a result, that

same year the government began launching several intermittent reform programs with the financial and technical cooperation of the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Even though it is impossible to find a single coherent reform package during this period, the reform process was conceptualized within the neo-liberal ideology of NPM.

Major administrative reforms were needed to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, and responsiveness of the public service. The administrative mechanisms needed to be able to coordinate planning and the execution of policies, programmes, and projects, and to achieve institutional stability. To this end, it was also necessary to recruit highly motivated staff who would give their best. To make the reforms successful, long-term effort and commitment were required.

International pressure was another factor for why the government opted to implement NPM practices. One of the major areas emphasized by NPM to advance the public service was human resource development and the management of personnel.

### NEW PUBLIC PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

NPM reforms commenced under the sponsorship of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the ADB. They included financial management reforms, re-establishing an independent PSC, and setting up a Management Assistant Service. In 1994, the UNDP mission was terminated due to its failure to contribute to substantial change in the public service. The ADB mission was initiated in 1996, and it focused on reorganizing the public administration structures, rationalizing public sector carders, and introducing result-based management systems and procedures (pp. 204–205). The reform process had six major objectives (Roots and Vaughan 2001, pp. 1975–1978):

- To formulate strategic policies and to coordinate them in order to achieve effective policy outcomes
- To adopt a result-oriented philosophy as the guiding management principle
- To separate policy making, service delivery, and regulatory functions of government
- To realign responsibilities in order to support the goals of the government and to achieve them more effectively

- To train staff to respond more effectively to the new concerns in the environment and thereby to realize their potential
- To redevelop surplus staff, if any, to new functions within government, or to new opportunities in the private sector.

The reform programme included several sub-reforms, but all were meant to achieve the main objectives of the NPM programme. Most objectives were to be achieved through structural and procedural reforms, but some related to the responsiveness of public administration. Drastic change in public administration was envisaged, but after a decade of implementing the reforms, they had failed to achieve what they set out for (Samaratunga and Bennington 2002, p. 100). Nevertheless, some reforms completely changed the ideology of the public administration, inasmuch as the privatization of public enterprises was mainly aimed at having private entrepreneurs absorb certain costs and attend to certain financial and technical responsibilities which had thus far been the preserve of the government (Public Enterprises Reform Commission 2002, p. 2). This dramatically reduced the importance of the public sector. Other reforms, by contrast, were aimed at institutional and human resource modifications and at introducing information technology for public administration.

The human resource management reform was expected to reduce the number of cadres by introducing a voluntary early retirement plan with financial assistance. Sadly, no significant cadre reduction occurred during 1994–2004. The politicians responsible for activating this proposal saw it as threatening to reduce the possible number of votes they would receive in the next election: a reduction in personnel would definitely make public servants afraid of losing their jobs. The public servants and their trade unions would then organize their support in favour of the opposition. The politicians knew that the unions for public servants wanted to protect as many jobs as possible; they also knew the strategies the unions use for dealing with governments, so they were reluctant to implement such a reform, even though they formulated the policies under pressure from external bodies such as the UNDP. To exemplify: in 1994, the president promised that in the forthcoming general elections, if her party won, the government would recruit 10,000 university graduates to the public sector on a permanent basis. Her party did win, and as promised, 10,000 graduates were hired. Likewise, in 2004, the president made another election pledge that if her government retained power for another six

years, 40,000 graduates would be getting permanent positions in the public sector. After coming to power, the recruitment processes started and, as the initial step, more than 25,000 graduates were recruited to the public sector. This shows that reforms in the area of human resource management and in achieving the optimal size of the bureaucracy had become mere rhetoric, with no real intention to achieve the expected or initial goals. The failure to implement this reform recommendation also appears to have triggered a negative reaction from international sources that supported structural adjustment. As such, it is crucial that administrative reform be reprioritized.

The NPM reform programme sought to achieve a profound change in the government's method of operation. The public sector was to be paired back to its core functions such as policy formulation, general administration, and the provision of key services, with emphasis on achieving well-defined output objectives. Both the production and the delivery of goods and services that could be done by private entrepreneurs were to be privatized or decentralized to lower levels.

### POLITICIZATION OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE

There is a basic incompatibility between, on one hand, Sri Lanka's socio-cultural orientation and the intentions of politicians who stand for the ethno-religious interests of the majority, and on the other hand, those who appreciate the colonial-English bureaucratic tradition. These groups came to loggerheads in the 1950s. As a result, the government was hostile to the bureaucracy, accusing it of being elitist, uninterested in the people's aspirations, and the major obstacle to realizing the socio-economic programs the government had prepared for the people's benefit. Although the public service was progressively involved in implementing the development programs, the government took measures to modernize it. According to Wijeweera, who has studied the transition from the Ceylon Civil Service to the present public service, the modernization demanded by the proposed changes of 1956 was painful but unavoidable; more specifically, it was intended to transform a law-and-order-oriented bureaucracy into an engine for social and economic change (Wijeweera 1988, p. 21).

The modernization process initiated in 1956 did not get very far due to the assassination of Bandaranaike in 1959. However, it involved an ideological awakening that continued to influence the country's



sociopolitical setup. Even with the growing mistrust of the public service, the government did not initially seek to politicize it; instead it continued the Ceylonization process.

Politicization of the public service categorically appeared with the introduction of the first Republic Constitution in 1972. This was undoubtedly a turning point in the political history of Sri Lanka because it was locally drafted in its entirety and terminated the compromises imposed under the Soulbury Constitution. More importantly, it made the country a free, sovereign, and independent republic. Although the constitution of 1972 primarily followed the Westminster model and differed from the basic cabinet system model in several respects, it did affect how the public service in Sri Lanka is administered.

Article 117 of the first Republican Constitution empowered cabinet ministers to appoint, dismiss, and discipline public service personnel. This was a decisive provision, never-before witnessed, and it deeply eroded every aspect of impartiality in the public service. The Board of Ministers was to discharge this power under the recommendations of the SSAB and the SSDB established under Articles 111 and 112. Meanwhile, the members of the SSAB and the SSDB were appointed by the president following the recommendations of the prime minister. In this context, the SSAB and the SSDB indirectly facilitated the political preferences of the government. Patronage appointments were thus systematically introduced in the public service.

The process of politicization culminated in the political elite subjugating the bureaucracy with the reforms it imposed, at the same time as it increased peoples' participation in the administration. The government of the United Front, which had a strong parliamentary majority, established workers' councils and advisory committees in the government departments and public enterprises, and the members of these bodies were elected on the basis of their active support for the ruling United Front Party (Wijeweera 1988, p. 52). Moreover, a system of people's committees was established for each ward of a local authority, so that people at the local level could contribute to formulating, implementing, and evaluating development programs. The aim was to enable the administration to be more responsive to the needs of the country and wishes of the people. The chairmen and members of these committees were appointed by a cabinet minister in consultation with the member of parliament for the given area, and the functions of the committees were confined to offer 'criticisms and advice' on the administrative process (ibid.).

These committees were not intended to absorb the authority of the administrative machinery, but were instead seen as necessary for introducing a more democratic process in the administrative machinery.

The politicization process appeared in the decentralized administration. Consequently, the Divisional Development Councils (DDCs) were established in 1971 as a first step to address the development objectives in a broader context, particularly, to lay the foundation for small-scale industries and to increase employment opportunities in rural areas. The DDCs operated under the chairmanship of the Divisional Revenue Officers with a wide membership of officials and non-officials, including the member of parliament of the area. Consequently, hundreds of projects were introduced but all suffered from lacking expertise and poor management and marketing (Wijeweera 1988, p. 54). The worst problem, however, was politicization of the DDCs' development activities.

The politicization process reached the peripheral part of the country in 1973 with the introduction of the District Political Authority system (DPA) and the Decentralized Budget system (DCB). With this, it became compulsory for the regional-level administration to be under the control of the political authority, thus reflecting the national-level administration. On the other hand, the Food Production Drive, which was a response to the food crisis and the state of emergency, intensified the need for cooperation between all the political parties and the administration. Consequently, the DPA was introduced to mobilize and direct the people and institutions in the district. It was also categorically stated that the administration should serve the political authority by coordinating the activities of the public service (Wijeweera 1988, p. 114). The district administration was therefore under the complete control of the DPA. An appointed political head of the district became the officer-in-charge on behalf of the government. Moreover, despite the national budget's provisions for regional development, the DCB was introduced at the same time to facilitate the DPA.

The government of the United Front introduced a comprehensive line-up of politicization within the public service, which inescapably linked its practices to political consent from the government. As stated, while this was seen as a path leading to a more democratic process, it was also strongly criticized as being a result of internal suspicion of the coalition government, which had compromised the professionalism of the public service through recruiting people who did the bidding of the political authority. As the politicization process progressed, it obliterated

the substance of a system of representative bureaucracy. When the second Republican Constitution of 1978 was promulgated, it brought the same result but in a different structure. According to its Articles 30 (1) and (2), the excessive power of the president as the head of the state as well as of the government has made the public service an instrument for carrying out the president's political will.

Needless to say, the president deeply influences every phase of administration, which intensifies the extent of politicization in the public service. However, in order to limit the president's power over the public service, the 17th amendment was introduced in 2001. According to this amendment, the Constitutional Council should recommend suitable candidates for the selected commissions and offices, including the PSC.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, due to political discrepancies, problems arose when the council members were chosen, so the amendment did not succeed. The 18th amendment was made in 2010. It replaced the foregoing amendment by appointing a Parliamentary Commission similar to the foregoing Constitutional Council, but with direct nominees from the ruling party who represent the political aspirations of the president.<sup>3</sup>

It is evident that the second Republican Constitution of 1978 granted excessive power to the president to exercise functions of office without checks and balances of any government institution. As a result, the president can influence every step of politico-administrative decision-making in favour of his or her position as the head of the ruling party and the government. This constitution has therefore dramatically intensified the process of politicization in comparison to the attempts made in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1972.

<sup>2</sup>The Constitutional Council consists of the prime minister, the speaker, the leader of the opposition in parliament, one person appointed by the president, and five persons appointed by the president on the nomination of both the prime minister and the leader of the opposition. There is also one person nominated upon agreement by the majority of the members of parliament, and he or she belongs to a political party or group which is different from that of either the prime minister or the leader of the opposition.

<sup>3</sup>The Parliamentary Council consists of the prime minister, the speaker, the leader of the opposition, a nominee of the prime minister who is a member of parliament, and a nominee of the leader of the opposition who is also a member of parliament.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to analyse the historical development of Sri Lanka's public service in general and its public personnel management, in particular. Three phases can be identified: the precolonial, the colonial, and the postcolonial phase. During the precolonial phase, public service functioned within a highly centralized context. Most features of the system were based on traditional social values and attitudes. Insofar as monarchs used the public service to strengthen their power in every nook and corner of the country, no modern democratic values and principles were imbedded in the system. In the colonial phase, some basic prerequisites for professional public administration were introduced, examples being merit-based recruitment and promotion, political neutrality, and responsiveness. In the postcolonial phase, the public service system seems to have gone in a precolonial direction. Several attempts have been made to improve the system through various reform programs and constitutional amendments. However, this study argues that these changes were aimed at regulating the outer layer of the public service without concentrating much on the internal processes and actors.

The discussion also elaborated that constitutional provisions in 1972 and 1978 have enabled politicization across the spectrum of public service. But this does not imply that during the colonial period, the public service was not engaged in political activities. Indeed it was, but the political officers did not formulate and implement policies for sake of self-fulfilment, nor did public servants aim primarily to please politicians. But this is precisely what happened in the postcolonial period.

Constitutional reforms in the 1930s, independence, political change in 1956, and the politicization of administration in the 1970s and onward have not been able to stamp out highly questionable practices in Sri Lanka's public service. The post-independence administrative reforms have focused on broad structural and functional adjustment; they have not been aimed to ensure human resource development in the public service.

To conclude, this study emphasizes that the political leadership is supposed to make visionary decisions in order to accomplish the intended objectives of reforms. According to the findings, it seems that the implemented reforms have mostly been based on political considerations and interests rather than on the goal of wider social and economic advancement. Lastly, this study has found a mismatch between the transformation in public service globally, and the snail-paced development of public service in Sri Lanka.

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