

Red Tape

(The interview of Professor ATHANASSOPOULOS to Mrs. Helen DELVINIOTIS. It was published in Eleutherotypia Newspaper of Athens, in the 29th November 1993. The main points are republished here and unfortunately they are still current issues...)

The “monster” of Bureaucracy and its extermination is the ambition of every new Minister of the Presidency. Until the News become history and remain deprioritized waiting for the next Minister of the Presidency to announce anew the extermination of the “monster” ...

This way, Public Administration is and remains the major patient of the Greek society: catching the attention of the Citizens, whom it never serves, it constitutes a living hell for more than half a million public servants, who live daily eight hours of boredom and sometimes of gloom behind old offices and bundles of paper, doomed to explain laws, regulations, provisions that usually refute instead of complementing each other....

Question: Mr. Athanassopoulos can you indicate from what does the Public Administration suffer, in other words its wounds ?

Answer: Certainly. A primary and important thing is the institutional framework, which in many cases appears extremely insufficient to correspond to the current needs, especially under the climate of urgent changes that should take place because of Europe. Therefore, one first approach could be made there. A second major problem is the personnel. There are Agencies which occupy an excess number of people that sub-function (bloated personnel), there are Agencies that do not have the essential personnel and the orthological distribution of labor between the various Agencies cannot be found.

A second element is the essence and form of the existing decentralization. While the urgent need of the Constitution is to organize the Public Administration according to the system of decentralization and the affairs of extreme importance to be dealt from the Organizations of Local Government, finally we don't have the expected essential decentralization.

Most of the jurisdictions are concentrated in the center. I must bitterly reveal to you that until 1984 if an Elementary School at Soufli would wish to install a telephone line, then the procedure that it should follow is the following : the IRS that the School belonged to should receive a decree, the Director should agree, then the Prefect should send to the Ministry of the Presidency the relative document and the Minister of the Presidency should approve the line connection at the 4th Elementary School of Evros.

We should transcend to a phase of decentralization which I fear will take quite a while to experience, because according to an ancient Greek saying someone feels sorry after loosing the goods he has already experienced. The central government in the

administrative center of Athens knows very well what it means when everybody submits to the administrative center, to the Ministers etc..

Q.: Would you think that a serious attempt for decentralization would create a clash of interests?

A.: Its purely a matter of political choice, in other words, up to what point the central government would want to give more jurisdictions and wherever this is necessary they should be accompanied by the execution of acts. In other words, any decision made at any other level to be able to be executed, to have no need for further formalities and also, wherever there is a need, to transfer the necessary financial resources. As we speak in the 13 Prefectures of the Country there isn't any financial resource legislated, which means that any of the Prefectures is dependent on the particular central administration. Another matter has to do with personnel training. Today, Greece has a public sector which corresponds to a 60 % to 65% while in other Countries the average is 40%. My proposition is that we should drop to 40% real fast.

Q.: In numbers to how many less employees does it correspond?

A.: First of all it is difficult to determine an exact number of public servants because we don't really know how many employees are engaged in the public sector. According to my speculations in the public and in the larger public sector there are maybe more than 600.000 employees. Perhaps we are talking about 800.000 people... It is not necessary for some of these people to lose their jobs. They could be transferred to another productive procedure or they could be trained on the state's expenses, the relative mechanisms do exist...

Q.: Would you consider as successful the attempt of the last three years to reduce the public servants?

A.: First of all any attempt, that tends toward an orthological organization of the public services, is desirable. I am not in the position to say if it has been successful or not, in the sense that the relative data are not available, in other words no one has announced yet that since 1990 for example when New Democracy took over there were 800.000 employees and that today they have already been reduced....

Q.: The Minister of the Presidency gave some numbers in the Parliament. Do you question these numbers?

A.: I cannot question or accept them, in the sense that there is no further clarification on what they represent, but if someone tells me that the total of the larger public sector corresponds to 450.000 people, then I would obviously doubt it. ...

I estimate that there are more. But I would like to explain that the number of 80.000 that corresponds to the decrease of the personnel is quite conventional, it could be 50.000 or 60.000 ...

None of us, who are not engaged in the government, is capable of replying to this question simply because there are no known censuses.

Q.: Does this occur in other States?

A.: In other Countries the Public Sector is smaller. When the public sector covers a 35-40% then there is no problem, so there is no need for any census in order to find out what is really going on. The state functions in a way that it does not press and is not oppressed. When the public sector represents a 60% to 65% it means that the same percentage of the gross national product is simultaneously produced and consumed by the public sector. If all the salaries would have to be paid, all the bonuses given, as well as raises then you can

understand why the government is so skeptical when it comes to the announcement of a raise.

Any government that is in power and I should say that it is a legitimate political choice, has the intention and the desire to give away as much as possible to the employees, to satisfy their real needs, to gain sympathies etc.. If the government is forced to make cut downs, then probably it is not in the position to give away and this means that it has a public sector which even though it produces, nevertheless it absorbs, so there is no surplus to cover other needs, especially on matters of modernization and development.

Another issue which is put forward is personnel training and quick and orthological education, in other words who will be trained, when and where and for what purposes. We observe the following tragic situation. I. (when I say "I", I refer to any Professor) from Panteion University of Athens, contribute to the "production" of scientific personnel, but my studies date back to 15, 20, 30 years. Some of us, may have the luxury for personal reasons to go abroad quite often, so we get acquainted with the new scientific trends, but the student "produced" today will get the Knowledge that I or others have acquired 5 or 10 years ago. But he will have to work in 2000. This way the person who has been prepared with the experience, the Knowledge and progress of 1985 is already in the margin, he is left aside from the current events. If you include this person in an administrative apparatus you will have to train him so as to inform him on what is going on. With Maastricht we have already a new legislation since 1-11-93. This was not available the other day so that I could teach it to my student at the University. Then, when he will be at the public sector having an assignment, a duty, we should transmit to him the experience that we

Εμπορική Τράπεζα

ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΚΗ ΕΠΙΘΕΩΡΗΣΗ

Τεύχος 11

Ιούλιος - Σεπτέμβριος 1997

Περιεχόμενα

Συριόπουλου Κ.,

Asimakopoulos J.,

McLeay S.J.:

Υπάρχει πληροφορία
στον όγκο συναλλαγών;

Γρ. Λουκά:

Τράπεζες και τεχνολογία:
τάσεις, κατευθύνσεις.

Η εποχή της πληροφορίας

Ι. Πάνναρου:

Η χρηματοδότηση
των τεχνικών έργων και
οι εμπλεκόμενοι φορείς

Εκδότης:

Διεύθυνση Οικονομικών
Μελετών

Υπεύθυνος ύλης:

Π. Δερμενάκης

Υπεύθυνος έκδοσης:

Τομέας Οικονομικής
Ανάλυσης

have already acquired within the Public Sector. Who will be able to give him this? We already have the Institute of continuous Education, but with what resources and through what procedures and how many people does it train every year?

Furthermore we don't have a policy on motives that would activate the average employee. when he is promoted because he has worked for a number of years in services of the public sector, when he doesn't have an objective, a system dependent on meritocracy he who produces more earns more or on the other side he has a moral compensation, a distinction...

Q.: So what could be done in the future in order to improve the situation that you have described?

A.: We could start from the Parliament which covers the 1/3 of the state's authority: decrease the number of the members of the Parliament (a decrease of 200 Deputies) and the representation of Greek migrants who are 6 to 7 millions, in other words apart from the 200 national deputies we should also include 30 Deputies representing the Migrants. This representation could not, in any case, disturb the majority and we would still be able to go on with our legislative work as we wish, while the migrants would be represented for link-up reasons and for a larger transfer from abroad towards the national center. There should also be a system of effective control of the public sector.

- Reduction of Ministries. The number 20 is quite good functionally speaking and less good in terms of political choices. It is obvious that each Party desires a larger number of Ministries, also to satisfy more ambitions, to use productively, in the good sense of the word, more political members.

- I suggest the introduction of the permanent Under Secretary of the State who will be a technocrat of high expectations and the link between the Administration and the Minister of any Party or the Minister of the next Party to be elected. Because this way there is no political continuity within the Ministry.

Each Minister has his distinct political action. The permanent Under Secretary of the State will be the link, a permanent member in all Governments, a technocrat of high expectations who will know that his role will be to function in a way as to assure a certain continuity between the public administration and the political leadership. This system also exists in other Countries, even in Nigeria...

- Meritocracy in terms of hiring and promoting public servants. We can have faultless judgments, in any case concerning the judgment of employees we could choose by lot among Greek University Professors who teach on the relative subject (this doesn't mean that I have a high opinion of University Professors and that I think that they should solve all problems and that they are capable of successfully dealing with them). We have 30 people, we can choose by lot 5 of them. We will use them in the particular competition. First of all, he, who has been chosen by lot, has no obligation to any ruling Party, furthermore, he feels the ethical burden involved in this case so as to function properly: he could be opposed to any Government in power therefore he could have no reason of being "obsequious", when he would have to execute a request coming from the "above". We can make this work. We could organize Panhellenic competitions for hiring people, but the committee should be randomly chosen so as to prevent the Minister from hiring Mr. X. I don't think that from those chosen by lot, there will be one who wouldn't be willing to behave as the occasion requires. But pre-electionally any Politician is a lover of the ideal and after the elections when established as the ruling Party, he must become

Το νέο Διοικητικό Συμβούλιο του Συνδέσμου Ελλήν. Περιφερειολόγων

Το προελθόν εκ των προσφάτων εκλογών νέο Διοικητικό Συμβούλιο του Συνδέσμου Ελλήνων Περιφερειολόγων συνεκρατήθη σε σώμα ως εξής: Πρόεδρος: κ. Δημ. Λαγός. Αντιπρόεδρος: κ. Ιω. Μυλωνάς. Γεν. Γραμμ.: κ. Γεώργ. Γεωργίου. Ειδικ. Γραμμ.: κ. Βασ. Τσινός. Ταμίας: κ. Προκ. Γκόγιαννος. Μέλη: κυρία Βασ. Δεληθέου, κ. Ιω. Ψυχάρης.

lover of the feasible; this means that within 5 or 8 months from the day he accepts his portfolio he must present a significant project, in order to improve his image within the Party as well as outside of it. As a result time presses and does not allow for the best possible choices.

- Offices for the information of the public should be created. The citizen doesn't know where to refer to. You show up in certain Services with your ID and they ask for a birth certificate. In Sweden we find the Ombudsman institution, an administrative Commissioner, where the citizens turn to express their complaints; this way the administration assumes the responsibility to investigate the matter and inform the citizen. This body could work under the responsibility of a beyond the Parties Committee within the Country at the prefectural level with as much jurisdictions as possible and the less possible dependence on a possible influence by the executive authority.

Q.: The President of the Auditors' Body of the Public Sector, is the at the time General Secretary at the Ministry of the Presidency....

A.: Which means that it is a personality chosen - I agree with the best possible criteria - from the ruling party, but this doesn't mean that he is not a subordinate to one or more Ministers.

Finally, we need the introduction of the institution of the Regions in Greece with elected Regional Chiefs. Now they are elected by the central administration, so they are Party friends, this is not bad, but when elected by the Government they have the moral, political and legal obligation to obey the Government.

These are some of the priorities that should be taken care of immediately, some of them will probably annoy some people as they will lead to the rearrangement of jurisdictions, nevertheless they will cost no money.

Q.: If you were Minister of the Presidency, how much time would you need to arrange all these?

A.: It depends... on how convinced I would be for the necessity of all these things, second what kind of administrative groups or agencies it supports, if the people who stand beside me can perceive some things or if they are there simply because the Party has placed them there and third if the Party agrees. If all these are positive, the introduction of the institution of the permanent Deputy Minister, the system of hiring, the administrative Commissioner, the reduction of Ministries, Offices for the information of the public, the beginning of political decentralization and the introduction of computer information systems, then I suppose that they could be applied within the next year and the first positive results would start to show.