

The Sir Robert Garran Oration

The Public Servant and Politics

Delivered by the Rt. Hon. Paul Hasluck, M.A., M.P. — Minister of State for External Affairs — at the 1968 National Conference of the Australian Regional Groups, Royal Institute of Public Administration held in Canberra on 18 November 1968.

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1. Introductory

The subject which I have chosen for the Sir Robert Garran Oration is "The Public Servant and Politics". I trust that I will be able to speak of it without anyone, either those present or those absent, applying my remarks to any individual case or to any particular occasion on which a public servant has sought election to Parliament. Indeed, as I proceed, you will find that I am trying to discuss a topic much broader than parliamentary elections.

Sir Robert Garran, the great Australian whose services to the nation and whose qualities as a man are honoured in this annual oration, affords as good an illustration as anyone could find of the meaning of the title of this address. He was a great public servant. He worked at the heart of Australian government and at the elbow of Prime Ministers for more than thirty years. Yet Sir Robert was not a member of any political party and never ran for a seat in Parliament. When I discuss the public servant and politics I give attention first to the work done by such a public servant as he was.

In popular discussion of the public service and politics the glib and the journalistic sort of story is always about the one or two public servants out of 50,000 who get into the news by resigning to contest a parliamentary election. Tonight I shall give chief attention to those who do not stray out of the fold. I want to discuss the part played in political life and in political thinking by those who remain public servants and who have no wish or ambition to be anything but public servants.

I shall be talking mainly of the Australian Government and of the Commonwealth Public Service but any general principles on which I may rely will be drawn from the British tradition of the public service in a parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarchy and any general principles which may emerge from my discussion would be expected to apply to all public services based on that tradition.

Politics is as comprehensive and as complex as the whole process of decision-making in government. The work of government is carried out by many institutions — the Parliament, the Executive Council, the Cabinet, the Public Service, various instrumentalities created for particular purposes, and the Courts. The legislative, judicial and executive powers are exercised in different ways at different levels and by various instrumentalities. Decisions are made in the exercise of all these powers and, in particular, decision-making is intertwined with administration. All this activity takes place in a political environment. The public service cannot avoid politics any more than fish can avoid the water in which they swim.

There remain difficult questions of what the political role of the public servant is, at what point he ceases to be involved in the shaping of a political decision, at what point he ceases to be politically active, and to whom he is accountable for his political actions.

For a large part of their working time a large number of public servants may be able to do their work without having to give deliberative thought to politics. The more closely their work brings them into the process of decision-making the more closely they are involved in politics.

Perhaps the first requirement is for the public servant to be able to recognise those developments which will lead towards political decision. This is not, for the public servant, a question of whether an action will win votes or lose

votes in the electorate but a recognition that the activity in which he is engaged is one on which the electorate may eventually pass judgment.¹

When he has recognised the political situation, the public servant can reasonably be expected to supply information fully and accurately to those who have the political responsibility for decisions. He is expected to give full, clear and impartial advice. He is probably expected also to do everything to ensure that his advice is taken fully into account. In doing all these duties he is not answerable to the Minister in the sense that he must please the Minister but only in the sense that he must inform and advise him in good conscience according to his own knowledge and judgment. In doing all this he is not expected to go so far as to make a judgment or to offer advice about the state of the electorate or the attitudes of any political party. It is for the Minister to decide what his party may do and what the effect on voting in the constituencies may be. The public servant's political activities belong rather to those factors in good government that have continuity factors which will still be there no matter which party is in power. He will be able to do this better and to see the situation clearly with less risk of dazzlement if he is not bemused by political affections. There is a great need at this stage of government for someone who has perspicacity without passion.

There comes a point when he has to accept the decisions of Ministers or Cabinet, whether or not it is contrary to the advice he has given and I would suggest that at that point the public servant's immediate duty to inform and to advise has been discharged in respect of the matter on which decision has been taken. But does he have no further responsibility? He is not expected to try to upset, amend or modify the decision but to accept it and to carry it out faithfully. Yet the decision may still have to be explained. It still has to be put into effect by administrative action. It may still have to be adjusted to changing circumstances so that the original intention of the decision is achieved. Is the public servant expected just to rule off the book and turn to a new subject and a new page?

We can deplore and I personally would deplore the tendency of any Minister to make political partisans out of public servants by involving them in the political advocacy or the political contest after decisions have been made. Equally I would deplore the ambition that any senior public servants might reveal to do the political job that really belongs to a Minister. But one has to recognise that a political decision does not freeze politics but only turns political energy into the chosen direction. The public servant has to steer a difficult course between continuing the old political argument (over which his political responsibility has ceased) and taking his due part in the new political activity of giving effect to the decision.

I would suggest that how far the public servant goes either in helping to shape a decision or in giving effect to a decision is not a question that can be settled by trying to explore theories of responsibility. The quick answer well might be that in the strict sense of the term the public servant has no responsibility. The question is rather one of what the politician expects and what the public servant himself regards as proper conduct.

The limit of the political activity of the Public Service is set less by any limit on its political responsibility than by its own view of what it is proper for the public servant to do. The conventions governing political activity in the Public Service are mainly in the keeping of the Public Service itself. The facts that the Public Service is necessarily involved in politics and that there is a limit to its political activity present a need for the Public Service itself to examine its conscience and to be jealous of its own honour and a need, too, for it to deserve and receive from other authorities due respect for its independence.

¹ Basically I think this means that it is a matter on which there may be a choice of one or more courses of action affecting the welfare of the State and the comfort of the people and that the choice will either establish, confirm or alter policy. That word "policy", for present purposes, might be defined as a course of conduct (i.e. a manner of acting in more than one single situation) in public affairs; and politics might be defined as the making and application of policy. Thus politics may either grow out of a set of principles previously adopted as a guide to political conduct or out of judgments made on the best way of acting in a particular situation either to achieve a desired result or to prevent the undesirable from happening.

2. A Question of Conduct

The strength of a convention derives from the fact that it expresses, not what authority imposes, but what a group or a society itself regards as necessary or desirable. We are inquiring therefore into the nature of the convention that is accepted by public servants themselves as governing their conduct and manners in respect of political activity.

I submit that the public servant has a double obligation, on the one hand to the authority that gives him instructions and, on the other hand, to the public whom he serves. Yet this "public" is separated from him by the same conventions that require him to serve them.

When a public servant says to a headstrong Minister, "You cannot do that, Sir," — and it is expected that he should say so if the need arises — he may be drawing attention to a provision in a statute, or he may be drawing attention to the fact that such and such a judgment of the Courts would lead one to expect that such an action would be upset, or he may be recalling that there is a Cabinet decision on policy that can only be reversed by Cabinet or he may be reminding the Minister of some principle of fair play and equity that citizens expect to see observed. He is not saying that he as a public servant does not like the proposal but he is giving his advice, drawn from his professional knowledge and training, that according to the laws, conventions and customary practices of society such action would be impolitic, if not improper. He is a custodian of a continuing national experience. In giving advice he may also be drawing attention to some simple facts that rule out what the Minister is proposing (for example, in an irrigation project that there may not be enough water to fill the dam). So far as he is advising on practicability he is the custodian of an accumulated body of technical and expert knowledge.²

² I have not discussed the role of the public servant as a custodian of political morality. To do so would require a preliminary digression to prove that such an animal did exist and to describe its haunts and habits. Then the discussion would have to range far beyond the limits of my present subject. Perhaps the most striking way to call attention to the topic is to summarise two or three of the observations made by Machiavelli in describing the state of politics in his day: A ruler should not keep his word when the motives that made him give it no longer exist and he will not lack publicity devices to show this breach of faith in a favorable light. You rule with men as they are and not as you would like them to be and you make use of their weaknesses. The end justifies the means and these means are not to be subject to limitations of morality or honour. Any politics not based on reality (in the sense of these paraphrases) is doomed to fail. Citizens have to be forced to be good. Then, having noted that there have been many practising politicians on both sides of politics in Australia in the past twenty-five years who act as though they thought all this made very good sense, one asks whether such a state of affairs is of any concern to the public servant. Does he have any interest in or any role to play in respect of political morality or is he to be a detached cynic? I would personally hope that, in seeking the balance between politician and permanent official that helps to produce good government in a parliamentary democracy, the public servant would believe that this is a matter of concern to him. It is certainly a field in which he might help to maintain a closer interest in morality than is general in current Australian political practice. There is one condition that gives him superior opportunities. The only yardstick used in politics, as in commercial life, is success in the simple terms of the amount of profit earned. The public servant can qualify his view of what success is; the politician has a limited chance of doing so for success in politics is measured in very simple terms — collecting votes, winning an election, commanding a majority in the party room or in the House. Such success may of course cover very many other meritorious achievements but it is not an essential component of such success that it should do so. The public servant is not only free of this simple test but can apply more intelligent tests to all he does or shares in doing. If he is willing to do so he still may not be able to reject what the politician decides to do, but he may have opportunities, by clarifying the issues, of helping him see more clearly what it is that he is doing. A combination of realist politicians and realist public servants — in the sense in which Machiavelli has described reality — would be a diabolic combination of power, inhuman and immoral. A combination of public servants and politicians who shared a common view on political reality and political morality probably is the only way of resisting such realism. This footnote has direct relevance to what I say later about the technician.

It has been a generally accepted principle that the public servant in the British tradition is not a party political supporter and his influence gains a great deal of strength from that principle both because he can speak independently of party and because he is known to be uncommitted and impartial. If he gives information and advice that a proposal is either improper or impracticable, such advice will lose its strength if it should even be suspected that it may be derived from the views of a political party with which the public servant is known to be in sympathy.

This non-partisan character of the public servant is also of value to him as a person and needs to be cherished by him. First, like all other citizens, he is entitled to the privacy of his own opinion. The fact that he works close to a government, based on party rivalries, does not alter the fact that for he, too, the vote at the ballot is a secret one and that he cannot be compelled to disclose his opinions to anyone. He can damage this position if he himself sets up a conflict between his right to privacy as a citizen and his duties as a public servant and compromises his own entitlement to privacy by engaging in partisan activity.

Second, it is especially important for him personally and for the Service as a whole that in applying for a job or for a vacancy in the Service such matters as his religious or political beliefs should not be taken into account or even made the matter of enquiry. It would be monstrous if applicants for entry to the Service or for promotion inside it were required to state what political party they supported. That is the way to nepotism and patronage and the destruction of the Service. It would be destructive to the efficiency of the Service and of good working relationships between its members and between the Service and the public if the opinion should grow that the way to entry or promotion was to show political sympathy with the Government or the Minister of the day.³

One valuable characteristic of the Service in the British tradition is that it has continuity. Majorities in Parliament may be changed by elections and, as a consequence, new Ministries may be formed. But the Public Service is unchanged and those who served faithfully under a Labour Ministry continue to serve faithfully under a Liberal-Country Party Ministry. It would be difficult for the public servant to do so, either in his own conscience or in his public reputation, if he had become the partisan of one political cause. More practically he could not be expected to be trusted either by his new political chiefs or by members of the public if he were to appear either as a turncoat and timeserver or as one who would still try in private to serve the party whom the electors had turned down. I submit that this continuity in the Service is valuable. It requires from the public servant self-denial rather than flexibility, freedom from partisanship rather than agility in adjusting one's allegiance.

Having regard to all these characteristics of the Public Service, I must say that I deplore certain tendencies which have become evident in Australian Government, especially when observed from the Ministerial side. One is the tendency shown in Parliament itself to try to call public servants to account or to involve them in enquiries by its committees or to demand of them that they produce papers disclosing the inner workings of the Service. In claiming to assert the rights and privileges of Parliament I wonder whether Parliament is sometimes ignoring

³ There is one situation in which there might appear to be an exception to this. This is the question of security when an officer is being selected for a particular position in which classified material of interest to the enemies of the State will come under his notice. Then it does become relevant to make some inquiry, for example into whether the candidate is or has been a member of the Communist Party or has the habits or the associations that might make him subject to persuasion or coercion by the Communist Party. This situation has been brought about by the avowed aims and the well-observed character of the Communist Party itself, these being different from those of any other party engaged in Australian politics.

The Communist Party has the aim of acting and is known to act to subvert the Government to which the applicant is being appointed to serve. The matter has ceased to be one of private opinion and has become one of a direct threat to security. Perhaps an analogy might be found with the acceptable public service regulation that a public servant should not disclose information that comes into his possession officially. Here is a person who can be reasonably suspected of being unable to observe that rule. The exclusion of a person either from appointment or promotion because of what may have started as a matter of personal conviction and belief is always and awkward and difficult one. The awkwardness has been created and the difficulty has been forced upon us by the doctrines and behaviour of the Communist Party. The same considerations apply to the adherents of any other group controlled from outside Australia or dedicated to the overthrow of government.

those of the Public Service in our system of government. More seriously have they sometimes taken steps which may tend to bring about that very political partisanship in the Service which, on reflection, most well-informed members of Parliament would deplore and to impair that continuity which is so valuable in government? Let Parliament call Ministers to account and pursue them as far and as fast as they wish but leave the public servant alone, not so that he can "shelter behind his Minister" (to quote one debater) but so that the Minister will face his own responsibilities and so that the capacity of public servants to serve the nation will not be reduced. If, by the action of Parliament, the senior public servant has reason to fear that he may be involved in party political controversy, it is an encouragement to him either to get deeper into partisanship or to become so increasingly a-political as to become useless. If he is expected to give firm non-partisan advice, without fear or hope of favour, he has to be protected from subsequent political inquests and arguments on what his advice is or should be.

There is also a deplorable tendency on the part of Ministers to involve public servants too deeply in their Ministerial affairs. (I exclude from these remarks Secretaries of Departments who have been selected and appointed by the Executive and stand in a special relationship to it.) The appointment of departmental officers as Ministerial private secretaries requires care on both sides. It is not necessary for a Minister to require such an officer to become his own political possession and it is not necessary for the public servant to identify himself with his Minister's politics or to become involved in a substantive way in the Minister's constituency affairs. Unfortunately it sometimes happens that they do.

Another risk emerged in the growing use of public relations officer by Ministers. Sometimes they are drawn from the Public Service and the nature of their work brands them unmistakably as belonging to one political herd. For ever after they can be recognised half a mile off in the centre of the mob by the nicks in their ears. Apart from the undesirability of this kind of political identification of a public servant, it might also be recognised that much of the so-called public relations work of today is contrary to the ideal of objectivity in the Public Service and falls below the professional standard that the Public Service might set for itself.⁴

Although in the course of his duties a Minister comes to work closely with various officers of his department on particular matters handled by them and he naturally forms some opinions of their capacity, I think a Minister also has to resist so close a relationship with any public servant as to make that officer his own officer rather than the officer of the department. I think he has to resist any temptation to form a "team" — his own team with himself as captain, coach and manager — out of his departmental officers. He has to respect their independence, their professional integrity and the fact that loyalty in relations between a Minister and public servant is not that of monarch and subject but the loyalty of both to a common purpose of good government. Perhaps I am somewhat rigid on this but I once saw a good department brought to confusion and near ruin by a Minister who tried to make it his own private possession to serve his own interests and no other interest, and who tried to subordinate all public servants to his own directions.

Freedom from partisanship does not come honourably by seeking the state of a neuter, though it may be, as the Apostle said in another context, that some do become eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake. It comes by the

⁴ The kindest view of political public relations work is that it tries to present the facts favourably. Its purpose is to persuade rather than to inform. A less kindly report on what is actually done under the name of public relations, however, is that practice deteriorates into giving only selected pieces of a story, then into trying to prove that part of the truth is the whole truth and then into fake and fabrication. The public servant should avoid this contaminating pit unless he wishes to smell like a politician and not like a public servant. It is more important for the community that he should avoid it because of the fundamental importance of information in a democracy. It would take another address to explore the very great problems that exist in the changing circumstances of today in achieving the desirable goal of a well-informed democracy and in discovering the public servant's role in helping to produce and spread information. For the present it is enough to express the view that the needs of democracy for information are not met by the current methods of using a "public relations exercise" to try to repair the shortcomings of the media of public communications but call for some other means of bringing before the voters, irrespective of party or sectional interest, information objectively prepared and clearly presented. Perhaps the real gap is revealed by the fact that so little of the voluminous official reports are either read by the public or even by persons such as academic teachers, publicists and reporters who might be expected to help in bringing the information fairly to the people.

recognition of devotion to a cause different from that of party politics. The constancy of devotion by the Public Service to the purposes of government in Australia is a devotion to something higher and wider than service to a political party that has won a political majority.

There is no reason why a Minister or a party supporter may not also rise to see the government of Australia in that wider sense and so to serve it but there is every reason why the public servant will not attain full satisfaction in his job if he does anything less.

For the public servant the convention of continuity of service to which I have already referred gives the obvious advantages of security of tenure, of structural stability in a large part of government and of constancy in the relationships of the Service with all the other institutions of government. There are also many incidental advantages that flow from the simple fact that no matter how often elections are held and no matter what the results of them may be, the terms and conditions of employment, the structure of the service and the rights of the members are undisturbed. I like to think, however, that those public servants who have a sense of participating in the formative work of government, will also appreciate that they are serving Australian government in a higher, wider and more durable sense than the politicians usually know.

Some incoming Ministers sometimes have to learn certain values or even certain procedures rather painfully by a repeated process of falling flat on their faces in public places. Some never learn. The public servant has these values and these established procedures in his keeping. If he is any good he ought to know them and he ought to observe them and help others to observe them. Simply because he is not in party politics he has a better chance than most of doing so.

Some Ministers never glimpse the truth that the government of a nation is different from advancing the interests of half a nation. The public servant should be aware of it all the time.

Some Ministers seldom see the truth that there was government of Australia for many years before they flitted on to the honey-filled blossom and that there will be government of Australia for many years after they have dusted the pollen from their feet. The public servant should know at least some of the great accumulation of wisdom stored in the files and realise that there has to be wise judgement as well as a public relations exercise in order that changes for good may be wrought in Australia.

Nothing that I have said should lead to any opinion that I expect Minister to lean on the Public Service as a crutch. I see a need for strong Ministers. They have the powers and they have to bear the responsibility. The Public Service itself has the right to expect clear, prompt and firm decisions from Ministers, both on policy and administration, and it cannot do its best work unless it gets them. Ministers need to use the Public Service and work with it, not shelter behind it. To do that well they have to respect the Public Service for what it is in its own right.

All that I have been saying has been intended to emphasise the fact that the Public Service, too, has its special place in the scheme of government and a role which should not be either exceeded or reduced. It is not an inferior group but a different and a distinctive one with its own status, duties and honourable tradition, and there cannot be good government without recognising that fact. I have wanted to emphasise my view of the need today for all others to respect and for the Service itself to maintain the conventions on which its very great capacity to serve the nation rests.

3. The Public Servant as a Political Candidate

Up to the present I have spoken of the politics of the public servant as a politics without partisanship. In the next section of my address, I will discuss briefly the separate questions that arise when a public servant chooses, as he is entitled to choose, to identify himself with one political party. He may do so either by becoming active in the membership of a political party or by contesting elective office as a candidate of a party. If he makes that choice can he avoid the consequences of it? Can he enjoy the best of both worlds at the same time?

Hitherto I have not distinguished between the responsibilities of officers at different levels of the Service. While it is obvious of course that the public servant at the post office desk is not involved in the business of government to the same extent as an Assistant Secretary of Treasury, I have not differentiated between them. My reasons were

partly that public servants grow up and the junior of today may become a senior in due course, and partly because the principles I was discussing were of general application in any situation or at any level of duty at which political issues, great or small, might arise.

In the case of the intention of a public servant to become active in a political party, either as member of candidate, however, we are dealing with an isolated act by a single public servant. In judging these matters it is immediately relevant to examine in each case the particular duties on which the particular officer is engaged.

The provisions by which a public servant may resign to contest an election and, if he loses, can be reinstated without loss of entitlements is a fair and reasonable provision for the greater part of the Service. An officer who is performing a duty that does not involve him in policy-making or give him access to the confidential papers of government on matters of policy will not carry with him into the political arena any knowledge of the secrets of government and, if he is defeated, he can reasonably be expected to return to duty after his defeat and to do a fair day's work for a fair day's pay on his routine duties under the direction of a Ministry about whom he has been expressing strong disagreement and lack of confidence on public platforms for the previous month or two. But is the position the same for the office who works in a field where decisions are made and policy is formed?

The problem is not simply one that arises because an officer has different views from those of a Minister. One would hope that many officers would have different views and have the chance to put them forward before decisions are made. The problem is partly one of the ability of the officer to continue to perform his duty and partly one of confidence. The officer has declared his views in public, he has expressed a purpose of working to defeat the Government, and, if we credit him with being a man of good principle and sound conscience, we would expect that after the election he will still believe what he said in public, that he will maintain the cause that he proclaimed in public, and that he will still want to defeat the Government. Can his Minister, his colleagues, or the members of the public be reasonably expected to give him full confidence as a non-partisan and objective public servant? Can he himself be reasonably expected to undergo a voluntary political sterilisation in order to serve a prince whom he wishes to displace?

Confidence is an essential element of good government. It is not merely a play on words that a government is said to have lost the confidence of Parliament. The convention that a Minister does not retain any financial interest in matters over which he has administrative responsibility is not based on the proposition that it is impossible for a man to make an unbiased decision if he stands to gain momentarily from that decision but is based on the need that the public should have complete confidence that there is no self-interest to influence him. It is a similar issue of confidence that makes it unacceptable that an officer who has declared an interest in defeating the politics of an elected government should continue to have access to have the opportunity of using for his own self-interest and advantage the materials from which government policies are made. At any given time, with the present close division of political support in Australia, somewhere near half the voters of Australia will be disposed to regard him as being "on the other side" and devoted to the interests of that side. Another aspect of the difficulty is that a public servant need not resign until a month before polling day and hence for a period, while still expected to serve the Government impartially, he may be busy in his out-of-work hours trying to win support for his own party.

These difficulties arise only in the case of officers who are sufficiently senior to be closely involved in making decisions on policy or likely to be closely involved in the new future. In fact, experience shows that this is seldom the case.

A quick examination of the list of the 182 Senators and Members of a recent Parliament revealed 18 who appeared to have been members of a public service, State or Federal, immediately before election to Parliament. Seven had been school teachers, two members of a police force, one a postal officer, one a shops and factory inspector, one a court reporter, one an income tax assessor, one a journalist on routine duties in the News and Information Bureau, and three clerks in routine administration. Only one of the members could be regarded as having been in a position where he might have had some influence on decision-making or have had access to information directly related to policy questions. From memory it appeared there had also been one defeated candidate who would have presented some problem of placement if after the election campaign he had sought to cancel his resignation and seek reinstatement in the Service but in fact he did not do so.

The facts of post-war Australian experience appear to be that the action of some public servants in becoming political candidates while still members of the Service could not really be described as introducing party politics into the Public Service. In some cases at least the party political activity seemed to have the appearance rather or throwing a rope over the wall to escape from the Public Service.

While preserving the freedom of conscience of the individual and his right as a citizen to become a political candidate if he chooses, I would myself hope that political parties and leaders would not seek to find party politicians in the Service, that all public servants would guard jealously the distinctive and special nature of the political responsibilities of the Public Service and that those individuals who seek to become members of Parliament will see clearly that they are making a choice that involves a rejection of the conventions of conduct on which a good public service rests.

Hitherto I have tended to lay the stress on the damage done by political partisanship and the need for the public servant to have a higher view of politics in order to escape these dangers. I now wish to refer to quite a different kind of danger which calls for sound political sense in the Public Service.

4. The Menace of the Technician

One development in the field of government that has caused me increasing concern over the past twenty years is the changing role and perhaps increasing power of the expert both in public administration and in politics. Perhaps rather dramatically I call this the menace of the technician. I do indeed see it as a menace to some highly precious values in government. I should like to discuss this briefly, not on this occasion to explore the subject fully, but rather to use it as an illustration to my main theme about the public servant and politics.

Nowadays the range and complexity of government business call for more specialised knowledge and great reliance is placed on the expert. The subject matter and the processes of government have both become more complex, and the work has called for greater technical competence in those who do it. With complexity, the need for planning and control grows. For the purposes of planning and control the need for expert study and technical competence grows.

In the highly specialised study and analysis that are necessary for the competent performance of a technical task, values and principles related to the nature of society as a whole tend to be disregarded. A technician devising an effective system of price-fixing necessarily spends so much time on his analysis of supply, distribution and consumption of a particular commodity that he may tend to find an answer that is derived solely from that analysis and, because of his pride in the skill and competence with which he has produced his answer, he will find wholly heretical or even foolish any objections by the ignorant that the people may not like price-fixing or that it may have undesirable social effects. He may become so devoted to the solution of his own technical problem that he may not see it as part of, or in relation to, other problems.

One sort of technician will dismiss such an objection as being "political", as though that is a rather sordid part of life, and his attitude will be that if "for political reasons" someone else makes the wrong decision he can wash his hands of it. Another sort of technician will admit in a rather kindly way that, of course, there are "psychological factors" — a rather sad fact of this imperfect world that spoils so many good plans. But more and more we see the rise into government of a more determined sort of technician who is so arrogant in his own certainties that he is just not going to allow the work of a lot of silly politicians or the foolish preferences of a lot of ignorant customers to stop him from doing what he knows to be right.

I distrust the technician when he claims to make the final authoritative judgement on public affairs. When I say that, I mean that I suspect that the technician tests what he does only by reference to standards which I think are incomplete. When he decides whether what he does is good or bad he applies tests that may be valid as tests of material and workmanship but are not valid as tests of the effect of what he does on other individual human beings or on human society. He concentrates his attention on the part and often fails to see the whole, and unfortunately the certainties that the technician bases on his own technical expertness and the veneration he has for his own techniques often lead him into that intellectual arrogance and vanity that obscure truth.

In the Victorian age the self-righteous man was usually a narrowly religious person who knew and said quite clearly that he and he alone knew the will of God and could tell others what it was. That kind of self-

righteousness is discredited today. It has been replaced by the self-righteousness of the technician who has a similar certainty that he and he alone knows what is right, fit and proper and says quite clearly that he and he alone knows what is right, fit and proper and says quite clearly that he knows it and that those who do not accept his views are inexpert and ignorant.

The menace of the technician is two-fold. One, he may be a false leader and I suspect he is because he leaves unconsidered so many facets of human existence. Secondly, he aspires to a tyranny of subjection of others to his own edicts based solely on his own studies and opinions. This is the double menace of folly and tyranny.

And where does he lurk? Mostly in the bureaucracy — both the bureaucracy of industry and the bureaucracy of government. His power is not in what he does himself but in his influence over and management of what others do.

The power of the technician comes partly from his own claims to expertness and to a greater extent from the ignorance and submissiveness of others, and from the present-day veneration of techniques over and above the purpose they serve.

Many of the risks of bad government today arise because some politicians who are not technically expert tend to lean too much on the advice of technical experts who know little about politics. There is the glamour for the politician of being thought advanced and living in the modern age. With a limited education himself and limited time in which to become more knowledgeable, he gets some gratification at hob-nobbing with the experts and he soon picks up their jargon, quotes their analyses and their statistics as though they were his own and fairly soon has also fallen into their state of mind by contradicting or confuting his critics by reeling off technical and scientific information supplied to him on a piece of paper. When the politician is advised by technicians only he is soon talking of simple facts like hunger in long sentences about nutritional factors, the in-puts and out-puts of agriculture, and the imbalance of this or that. Yet the political fact is hunger.

Government needs public servants who are better clad against this deterioration than are its politicians. Governments will be better run if there are at least some of its public servants who are politically active enough to correct the experts who are nothing more than expert. In giving information and advice to Ministers, the public servants will need all the expertness that the technicians can supply but if this advice goes forward without any political considerations in mind and without knowledge and experience of political factors being added, it will almost certainly be misleading advice.

The recent report of the Fulton Committee on "The Civil Service", presented to the British Parliament in June 1968 (CMD 3638) made a review of "The Civil Service Today" in Chapter 1 of Vol 1 (pp 9 to 14). The majority of the Committee, you will recall, argued that the Home Civil Service today was the product of the nineteenth century philosophy while the tasks it faced today are those of the second half of the twentieth century and it sought to remedy that situation. In my view the Committee distorted the problem by presenting an antithesis between a tradition of the "all-rounder", "generalist" or "amateur" in the Service and the present-day need, resulting from technological progress, new knowledge and the increase in the activities of government, for a new sort of expertness. It found that the "cult of the generalist" was "obsolete at all levels and in all parts of the Service" (paragraph 15) and said that "a wider and more important role must be opened up for specialists trained and equipped for it". I do not quarrel with the description of the changed situation but believe that in presenting the antithesis and in developing it elsewhere in the report, the Committee did not give sufficient value to certain elements which it had itself noted and then apparently forgotten. First, it had itself noted that "because the solution to complex problems need long preparation, the Service must be farsighted... A special responsibility now rests upon the Civil Service because one Parliament or one Government often cannot see the process through" (paragraph 12). But it did not appreciate that this argument in respect of the need for technological expertness also applies to those other matters of political importance which it mentioned in the next succeeding paragraph, — the "political accountability of the service", the need for civil servants to have "a lively awareness of the political implications of what they are doing or advising", the need for flexibility to serve governments of any political complexion and, above all, (the emphasis is mine) the need to "remember that it exists to serve the whole community, and that imaginative humanity sometimes matters more than tidy efficiency and administrative uniformity" (paragraph 13). It is not to deny that the need for the specialist or the expert technician, to say that these important (indeed in my view over-riding) needs, which no less than the technical

tasks have to be served in the long term while governments come and go, require the retention in the Service of the so-called "all rounder". Lord Simey, in his reservation to this Chapter of the report said: "It is true that modern economic and political organisation needs high specialism, but it also needs more general qualities of judgement and decisiveness, and the ability to understand how the reshaping of values may be embodied in and implemented by public policy. In effect, both specialists and generalists are required, and the problem becomes one of relationships and responsibilities, rather than the exclusion of one in favour of the other. Modern techniques, such as linear programming, cost benefit analysis and other methods of specialised analysis are clearly needed and should be used to the full in the Civil Service. They do not, however, supersede the importance of the fundamental qualities of judgement which are vital to the successful prosecution of government business" (paragraph 5 of the Reservation at pages 101–103. I agree with that statement.

In pursuing this argument in an Australian context I would have related it more closely and more precisely to the political role of the public servant, in discharging his political responsibility to the Australian community, in preserving continuity of government in a way different from that in which the elected politician does it, and in ensuring that political advice on a matter requiring political judgement is broadly based. Seeing the threat to popular and representative government made by the new autocracy of the technician, I give great value to the superior opportunities which the public servant has for resisting this trend to autocracy. To let the autocrats have a free run in the Public Service would be to surrender the battlefield to them.

I am not arguing against public servants having technical competence, nor against having technical experts in the Public Service. I am arguing against the technician being given the wrong role and against the replacement of political judgement by technical judgement.

Politics is the art of the possible. In politics the answer to what is possible is not only a technical answer. It is an answer that includes judgements on values, on human response, and on the whole structure, purpose and principles of the society in which the political action is to be taken.

Good public servants help the good politician to make these judgements wisely and occasionally they may be able to steer the bad politician away from foolishness.

The public servant has a difficult middle road to follow. His difficulties are increased in Australia because in some ways his opportunities are easier and the dependence on him is greater because politicians who rise to Ministerial rank often have an educational standard which is not comparable with that of their officials. I feel sure that you will agree that the chief barrier against the undue growth of a bureaucracy or a technocracy in replacement of parliamentary democracy is the strength and competence shown by Ministers directly answerable to Parliament. We need more Ministers who can match their advisers both to accept their advice wisely and to avoid a position where advice becomes a decision. There are also dangers that officials fail to recognise that a Minister who may not have the same educational standard as they have may have other qualities derived from close and shrewd experience of the Australian community which the public servant may lack. While helping to repair the deficiencies of the politician, the official may sometimes also have to modify his own confidence that he himself knows everything and the Minister knows nothing. He also has to respect the political responsibility that a Minister carries and not be affronted if he is occasionally overruled.

Unfortunately, the muddled state of popular discussion of these matters, as reflected in the press, tends to attack as bureaucratic any public servant who does too much and at the same time to attack as autocratic any Minister who does not do everything the official proposes he should do. It is for us who are in the job to realise that both the politician and the public servant need the highest qualifications in the task of government, that we have our complementary roles in making a democratic system work efficiently, and that the errors come when we mistake the respective parts we play or when either one of us fails to play our own part adequately, and if we are unable to respect each other.

5. Conclusion

Obviously I have only touched the fringes of this great subject and I have left many topics unexplored and many questions unanswered. Obviously, too, at many points I have expressed personal opinions rather than completing a disciplined study. I offer my remarks as a contribution to the discussions of the Royal Institute of Public Administration and certainly not as a Ministerial pronouncement.

In the course of my life I have looked at politics and public administration from many different vantage points. With these opportunities tonight's contribution ought to have been much better than it is, but its deficiencies are in my capacity and not in my experience. Modest as it is, I trust you will accept it as doing at least some honour to that great public servant and shaper of Australian political life whom we commemorate tonight and whom I had the personal pleasure of knowing as a friend.

In conclusion may I offer as a motto for the public service an inscription I read only last week over the door of the Council house of the small city of Dubrovnik, which from the seventh century through the ebb and flow of Empires managed to keep its own identity and a measure of independence: "OBLITI PRIVATORUS PUBLICA CURATE", of which I give this rough translation: "When you are inside this door, forget private interests and make public interests your care".