

Organizing for development

by Juanita G. Trinidad

The never-ending process of political and social development continually exerts new demands and pressures on government and necessitates periodic reassessments of governmental structures and operations to ensure they respond to the changing conditions and needs of society.

With the shift from a presidential to a parliamentary form of government and the conversion of departments into ministries, the second phase of the Integrated Reorganization Plan (IRP), formulated in 1972 by the Presidential Commission on Reorganization (PCR), is now under way. The plan was submitted to the Batasang Pambansa, which approved it in principle.

In an interview with The Republic, Dr. Armand V. Fabella, PCR chairman, clarifies some aspects of the new system.

The Republic: What are the basic differences between the new government plan and the system which previously existed? What are the advantages of the changes?

Dr. Fabella: Our government was modeled along American lines, with three branches of government: the executive, legislative and judicial—possessed of sufficient checks and balances to keep anyone from becoming too strong, and with the thrust on the provision of general government services.

The problem with this kind of government is that it places stress on the correct decision. But in order to get a correct decision, you need time, you need people or groups getting together to discuss the problem and working to find a solution. The discussions you get would probably be good, but it might take forever to get an answer. That we can't afford. We need a development-oriented system.

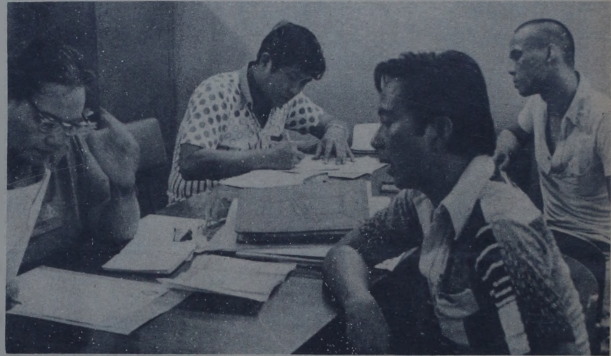
What do you mean by a development-oriented system? I mean a system that is very much aware of the need for getting things done faster, a governmental structure in which people can make decisions quickly. This is possible if you give people sufficient authority, whether at the national, regional or barangay level. There are dangers in this. Most often, the danger is with the person who is supposed to decide. He can make mistakes; he may tend to make the wrong decisions. Another danger is that he will tend to abuse his power.

But even if you take both factors into consideration, the important thing is that decisions will be made faster. Make your decisions fast, get things done. If you make mistakes, sorry na lang, but the government moves.

The new system frowns on the next-in-rank concept for promotion. What is the new policy? The next-in-rank approach for promotion has severe limitations. Let's say that I am running an office and you are my subordinate, my next-in-command. If for some reason I leave the office, the post becomes vacant and you have a claim to my position. You can say, "I'm next in rank, I'm entitled to that position." That may be nice for you but it's not necessarily good for the government. We are civil servants and the government is entitled to the best services it



Manila post office: one of government's prime reorganization targets.



OEDB staffers reviewing job applications: the government exists for only one purpose—to serve the people.

can get, and it may not get that from you. All we did was expand the concept of the next-in-rank. Let's say I plan on leaving my position. I tell the employees, "All of you on a certain level will be considered for my position." This provides some sense of competition, a drive to prove capabilities. Otherwise, everyone just sits and waits to go up in due course of time! As happened in many cases in the past, if the good ones leave the office, *natiira iyong mga hinihintay-hintayang lang*. Before you know it, the whole operation is filled with people who get there simply by patiently waiting!

How will the new system eliminate duplication or overlapping of services?

It won't. It will try to avoid it, but the government is organized to deal with priority areas and that brings overlaps. For example, if we say that housing is a priority area, we create the Ministry of Human Settlements. If we say that tourism is important, we create a Ministry of Tourism. We may say some other agencies are not important, so we abolish them. What I'm driving at is, with the many priority areas that have cropped up, it has become very difficult to indicate just what is the responsibility of an individual department. Thus, as we have more ministries, there are many possible overlaps in function.

We are trying to keep overlaps minimal to define who is responsible for what. We have developed what we call "exclusive responsibility" and "primary responsibility." For example, when we talk about auditing systems, we say that the Commission on Audit (COA) has exclusive responsibility. When we talk about training, we say that the Civil Service Commission (CSC) has primary responsibility, because the CSC cannot claim that it is the only one that trains. Who can construct dams? Only Public Works. Who can provide medical services? Not only the Ministry of Health. The Army does also.

Parenthetically, two other important things are to bring more and better services to the people and to accelerate the development process. Of course, when you bring services to the people, you are in effect accelerating or improving the development base. Everything else comes from these basic thrusts.

Are government-owned and controlled corporations included in the new reorganization?

Yes, they are, in the sense that government-owned and controlled operations have been under the Office of the President which has over 200 offices directly under it. These are now being divided among the various ministries, making it easier to coordinate related activities.

What in your opinion is the most important aspect of the new reorganization scheme?

Planning. The planning process must take cognizance of many factors, particularly having to do with the improvement of the civil service, the decentralization of Malacañang, regionalization and setting up a standard department structure. With the parliamentary form, there are questions as to who is responsible for what and who reports to whom. Take the new political deputy minister—even his responsibilities are still unclear. Ministers will have their deputies answerable to them but on an equal footing with them in Par-

liament. These are among the things which still have to be straightened out.

What major government policies will the new system implement?

Since 1972 we have stressed regional development, planning and the building of a career executive service. You can compare the government to an army. Though the army is the only entity relied upon to fight, not everybody in the army fights. The one who really fights is the infantry soldier. Behind him are cooks, quartermasters, clerks, physicians, drivers. But they are only secondary; the one who counts is the combat soldier. Therefore, you measure the efficiency of an army in terms of the ratio between the soldier and the number of support troops that back him up.

Similarly, the government exists for only one purpose: to serve the people. And serving the people is not an abstract concept; it is specific. The government serves the people when somebody in government comes in contact with the people. For example, a doctor serving in the rural areas and actually staying with the people is directly serving the government. On the other hand, the Bureau of Internal Revenue giving medical aid to BIR personnel is only indirectly serving the government.

What we are trying to do now is make sure that most of the people in the government are in direct contact or are actually serving the people. How do we do this? There are two ways: You don't ask the people to come to you. You get government workers out in the field to stay with the people. That is a very important element in the development of the regions.

The second element is that in any office, whether serving the people directly or not, we have line personnel and staff personnel. Line personnel are those who are actually engaged in the operation, while the staff personnel advise the head of the department on what to do.

What is the progress report on the new reorganization? What has been accomplished so far?

Implementation of the IRP actually started in 1972. The secondary phase has begun with the conversion of the government into a parliamentary form. The fact is that even the original reorganization took into consideration the possibility of a parliamentary government. Now that it is definitely parliamentary, we must make distinctions between political and career positions. Previously a department head was only an alter ego of the president. Under the parliamentary system, there are no more alter egos; all officials have power in their own right.

The thrust, therefore, is really with respect to the regional or subregional levels of government. Putting it another way, just how does one go about coordinating government activities at provincial and municipal levels, between national and local governments? This is the problem, especially now that every department wants to have its own units from provincial down to barangay level. Every department has a regional office, but each one is now saying that underneath the regional office, there should be a provincial office, and underneath the provincial office, a municipal office. To be sure, this is reaching out to the grassroots, but it is very expensive.