

6 juin 1962, Québec

Congrès de la Public personnel Association

La Public Personnel Association termine aujourd'hui son congrès. Je suis donc malheureusement en retard pour vous souhaiter la bienvenue dans la capitale de la province de Québec, mais je suis convaincu que vous avez apprécié votre séjour ici et que vos réunions et vos sessions d'études ont été fructueuses. Le but que poursuit votre Association justifie tout l'intérêt que vos membres y apportent et mérite que tous les citoyens conscients de leurs responsabilités y donnent leur appui.

You have set for yourselves the task of giving emphasis to the worth and dignity of the public service. On this score, governments, whichever ones they may be, owe you a great debt of appreciation. They realize that the work of associations such as yours, together with their own efforts, will, in the end, provide the taxpayers with competent administrative personnel, proud of their work and especially keen to make their contribution to the progress of their town, their province, or their country. You are rendering an even more essential service because it is only recently, both here and elsewhere, that a new day has dawned for those who are employed in public administration. The citizens have a greater and greater tendency to thrust more and more responsibility upon their public administrations. •Today's realities make this necessary, because the size and nature of present social problems are such that government must take a hand in solving them. Certain people regret this tendency, but in most cases it is because they think that the expansion of government action is nothing more than state management, pure and simple. As far as I am concerned, I can see no danger in this — as long as the government only assumes those responsibilities which fall within its proper scope for the safeguarding of the common good, without insinuating itself into things which private enterprise can bring to a successful conclusion through its own efforts.

Be that as it may, all the world's public administrations, great or small, need qualified personnel. The difficulty with which several of them are faced is that they are still short of this type of personnel. The Government of Quebec knows this problem very well, because we are facing it and its consequences every day.

I do not mean to say that the civil servants whom we have at present are not doing their work well or that their output is not satisfactory. This is not what I mean. And there is no need for me to take the whole of my allotted time to give you a summary of the history of our province over the last few years, and to show you that what I would call the « a'biens conditions » did not always favour the emergence of careers in public administration here in this province.

Naturally, after the people of Quebec entrusted us with the administration of the province, almost two years ago, the number of problems with which they were faced was terrific. As all Quebecers will remember, one of the first things we did was to tackle one of the principal causes of the very discouraging state in which we found the civil service of our province. We made a concerted effort to free our methods of recruiting from politics, which, all too often in the past, had dominated the choice of candidates for one appointment or another in public service positions.

I must tell you right away – because in this sphere as in any other I intend to be realistic, and because I want to speak to you frankly, to you who are devoting your efforts to the development of an even more efficient public service – that in doing what we did, we never expected to be able to solve, within a week, a problem that had been in existence for several generations. I believe, nevertheless, that we have made a great deal of progress in this respect, in spite of the short time that has elapsed since we took over the administration. Today, everyone agrees that the atmosphere has changed in Quebec's civil service, and that a new spirit now prevails.

Does this mean that we should be satisfied with the results already achieved and that we should ease our efforts to improve even further the standard of our civil service? In my opinion it would be dangerous to think so. I have just said that we cannot, from one day to the next, break habits which have been acquired over a number of years. A form of behaviour which I can only call traditional cannot be changed very quickly. This applies anywhere, and I cannot see any reason why it would not also be the case in Quebec.

This is the reason why as Premier of this province, I am fully aware — as are my colleagues — of the constant struggle that we must carry on in this regard. We cannot claim to have achieved perfection, but we are certainly on the right road, judging by the comments that we receive.

Ce n'est pas tout de dissoudre le lien qui a pu exister étroitement entre l'affiliation politique réelle ou présumée et l'admission à des fonctions administratives publiques. Il faut aussi que les fonctionnaires de l'État québécois reçoivent, d'une façon ou de l'autre, la formation qui leur est nécessaire. Cette exigence, et cela est normal, s'applique davantage à certains niveaux de l'administration qu'à d'autres.

Nous avons actuellement, dans le fonctionnarisme québécois, des personnes qui ont toutes les aptitudes naturelles nécessaires pour devenir des administrateurs exemplaires. Ils se rendent toutefois compte que, malgré leur expérience, ils bénéficieraient grandement d'une formation systématique plus poussée que celle que les circonstances leur ont permis d'obtenir dans le passé. Le gouvernement que je représente ne peut pas se permettre le luxe de ne pas exploiter au maximum les qualités et surtout la bonne volonté dont ces personnes font preuve. Je parle de leur bonne volonté parce que ces fonctionnaires l'ont manifestée bien clairement au cours des derniers mois. Un bon nombre d'entre eux – je ne saurais vous dire exactement combien parce qu'il est très difficile de compiler tous les efforts individuels que ceux-ci fournissent en vue d'acquérir une formation plus complète – un bon nombre, dis-je, ont accepté de s'inscrire à des cours en administration publique. Ces cours qui ont lieu, par exemple à l'Université Laval, se donnent le soir et le samedi, donc après la période normale de travail; on nous dit que l'assiduité et l'esprit de travail de nos fonctionnaires sont remarquables et qu'on sent chez eux le désir de se rendre plus utiles et plus efficaces. Je me permets, ici ce soir, de les féliciter publiquement et de les encourager dans leurs études.

It is obvious, and everybody is aware of this, that we cannot count on a scattered and limited number of people to make up the shortages which will persist just as long as the production of qualified personnel is not undertaken by both the Government of the province and the universities of Quebec. This systematic effort cannot be improvised, and it is so difficult to

carry out that the Government is faced with a dilemma; either, in co-operation with the universities and other institutions of the same kind, give temporary leave to all its employees who want to take advanced courses in public administration, during which period we will have to do without their essential services at a time when there is so much to be done; or to avoid the difficulty, resign ourselves to letting each civil employee get some form of additional training outside of working hours, as is the case at present, which results in too few persons getting this additional training.

We are at present looking into ways of getting out of this dilemma. We feel that the solution lies in finding a happy medium, and it is in applying this happy medium, if such it may be called, that the difficulty arises. We are in a complete state of transition, not only as far as the civil service is concerned, but in many other fields, and it is impossible to achieve immediately the ideal which is called for by the present situation.

Yes — the question of our civil service — is far from being the only thing that is occupying our minds. We have to take action in every field at once, and in Quebec as elsewhere, those who are responsible for government administration are, after all, only human beings. Nevertheless, in proportion to all the problems that we are trying to solve, we are giving an even greater amount of thought to the establishment in our province of a competent civil service, whose members will be interested in their work.

With the same thought in mind, that of making our civil service more efficient, we did not hesitate, right from the start of our administration, to obtain the services of a good number of specialists from all branches of learning, who came either from private firms or from other governments. These specialists, most of whom are relatively young, were very keen to come and work for a government that had a programme of action which was in keeping with their hopes and ambitions. Today, we can congratulate ourselves on the wonderful support that they have given us. In addition to the care which we have taken to give back value and dignity to our civil service — a cause which must never be allowed to slip — because a civil servant must always be ready to adapt itself to new developments, and should always surpass himself in the search for an ideal — we have also gone ahead and made certain changes in the administration. I will not bore you with the list of the changes we have made in the machinery of government in Quebec, but I would like to point out briefly, because this subject is of special interest to you, some of the objectives that we pursue.

First of all, we want the huge structure which is the Government of Quebec to become as efficient as possible. I know perfectly well that certain sincere people take it for granted that government, as such, must inevitably function less efficiently than private enterprise. Personally, I do not believe that this idea is always well founded. As a matter of fact, it is quite possible for government administration to become efficient if it is not so already. It is only a matter of making an honest effort to assume the task of coordinating government activities. Furthermore, private firms are not all automatically efficient simply because they happen to be operated by private enterprises. There are a thousand proofs to the contrary.

On dit parfois que l'administration publique a tendance à être lente, tant dans ses décisions que dans ses actions. C'est fort possible, et même probable. Comme je l'ai mentionné il y a un instant, ainsi qu'au début de ma causerie, les gouvernements actuels sont devenus de

dimensions impressionnantes. Le progrès économique et social le veut ainsi. Il faut également se rappeler que toute administration vraiment démocratique doit fonctionner sans brusquerie et en tenant compte de tous les éléments en présence, de même que des expressions d'opinions de la part des intéressés. C'est cela qui exige du temps, des délais. Une dictature peut agir vite; elle n'est pas pour cela nécessairement efficace. Il importe de ne pas confondre.

Nos réformes administratives ont un second objectif, corollaire au premier. À cause des tâches considérables que le peuple du Québec désire confier à son gouvernement, – et qu'il a de fait déjà commencé à lui confier, il est indispensable que celui-ci devienne assez souple pour exercer des fonctions nouvelles.

Je ne prétendrai pas que jusqu'ici nous avons déjà prévu toutes et chacune de ces fonctions nouvelles, et cela pour des années à venir. Je ne prétendrai même pas que la réorganisation à laquelle nous avons procédé dans plusieurs ministères soit entièrement à point à l'heure actuelle. Chose certaine, avec l'aide de mes collègues et à la demande de la population du Québec, nous avons résolu de doter notre province d'un gouvernement de type moderne. Comme vous le savez, – et je l'ai souvent répété, nous ne considérons pas le gouvernement du Québec comme un organisme purement administratif. Notre conception de la structure gouvernementale va plus loin; nous l'envisageons comme un instrument dont notre peuple peut et doit se servir pour réaliser les objectifs qu'il s'est fixés.

In short, the government has an active part to play in this province. It is at present preparing to assume this role, and I wanted to speak to you this evening about this process of adaptation and even of transformation. This process may take longer and be more difficult than we would perhaps like it to be, but it is essential that it be carried out.

It is essential because the future of the population itself is intimately tied in with the degree of success which we will be able to achieve in this effort, which is part of the renewal which we began two years ago, and which we have been carrying on ever since with strength and confidence.