

CHAPTER 7

THE ROLE OF THE STANDING COMMISSION IN THE CONSULTATIVE MACHINERY

7.1 In the course of our deliberations we have considered carefully the question of what role the Standing Commission might play in the consultative machinery. Views on this aspect from staff and management have been constructive although somewhat diversified. While some would like to see us taking up the role of "Arbitrator", "Adjudicator" or "Mediator" in disputes between the Administration and civil servants, others cautioned that it might be counter-productive if we were directly involved in settling disputes, particularly where these concern pay or conditions of service, or have arisen as a result of our own recommendations. On balance, we endorse the majority view put to us that we should not be so involved, but we shall keep this matter under review.

7.2 In the twenty months since our establishment, there have been a number of disputes which were really management issues and thus outside our Terms of Reference, and which should have been resolved by consultation between the staff and management concerned. We believe that effective consultative machinery, coupled with good staff management generally, should help to reduce the number of problem areas and disputes between Government as the employer and civil servants as employees.

7.3 One recurrent comment we have received from staff since publication of our Report No. 2 is that the points made in their submissions do not appear to have been adequately considered or answered. We wish to take this opportunity to point out that with some 600 grades in the civil service, and with some of the submissions running to 100 pages, it is difficult if not impossible for us to answer all the points made in staff submissions in our published reports. That does not mean that we have not considered each and every submission conscientiously before we arrived at our conclusion on any particular grade or issue.

7.4 Among the replies to our Consultative Document was a suggestion that we should engage in final-stage consultations before submitting our recommendations to the Governor. There are practical difficulties in accepting this suggestion. Firstly, as an independent and advisory body, we report directly to His Excellency the Governor : we are not a negotiating body. Secondly, such consultations would be bound to create unacceptable delays bearing in mind that there are some 130,000 civil servants spread over some 600 grades. To obtain any consensus of views on the recommendations we intend to make is a well-nigh impossible task. Thirdly, our recommendations must have regard to the overall community interest, including wider financial and

economic considerations, and these are not always compatible with staff expectations. Fourthly, we must also take into account internal relativities and preserve justifiable relationships in pay between grades if we are to be fair and impartial to all. For all these reasons, we are unable to accept the suggestion that there should be final-stage consultations before we submit our reports to the Governor.

7.5 That is not to say that we shall not continue to consult staff and management before we formulate our advice. On the contrary, from the very early days of our work, we have attached great importance to consultation with both staff and management. Before embarking on our review of Principles and Practices governing Civil Service Pay in 1979, and again before our current review of civil service consultative machinery, we issued Consultative Documents to both sides and were encouraged by the response (over 180 submissions to the former and 70 to the latter) to our invitation for comments. We propose to continue with this consultative technique for future major studies. Furthermore, our frequent meetings with staff groups and department heads have given us a better understanding of their requests, problems and aspirations, while our visits to departments have enabled us to see civil servants at work and to relate problems on paper to actual situations. We have found these meetings and visits interesting and helpful, and will continue with them in our future studies.

7.6 Much has already been done in developing contact between staff associations, management, and the Standing Commission. Much, however, remains to be done, and we shall continue to play an active role in developing the existing liaison arrangements, and contribute as best as we can towards the improvement of staff-management relations. In this important task, we value and rely on the continued co-operation and support of staff associations and civil servants.