

# COLONIAL BUREAUCRACIES



**COLONIAL BUREAUCRACIES  
POLITICS OF ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM  
IN NINETEENTH CENTURY AUSTRALIA**

**HABIB ZAFARULLAH**



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*Colonial Bureaucracies: Politics of Administrative Reform in Nineteenth Century Australia*

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## **Dedication**

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**In memory of my Father,  
who inspired me to discover new worlds and explore their past!**



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## Abbreviations

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<i>ABD</i>	<i>Australian Biographical Dictionary</i>
<i>ADB</i>	<i>Australian Dictionary of Biography</i>
BCS	British Civil Service
CGS	Concise Guide Series (SRNSW)
CSB	Civil Service Board
CSD	Colonial/Chief Secretary's Department
CSC	Civil Service Commission
CSO	Colonial/Chief Secretary's Office
DAB	<i>Dictionary of Australian Biography</i>
HRA	<i>Historical Records of Australia</i>
HRNSW	<i>Historical Records of New South Wales</i>
ICS	Indian Civil Service
ML	Mitchell Library
NSWGG	<i>New South Wales Government Gazette</i>
NSWJLC	<i>New South Wales Journal of the Legislative Council</i>
NSWLAV&P	<i>New South Wales Legislative Assembly Votes and Proceedings</i>
NSWPD	<i>New South Wales Parliamentary Debates</i>
NTR	Northcote-Trevelyan Report
PSB	Public Service Board
QGG	<i>Queensland Government Gazette</i>
QLAV&P	<i>Queensland Legislative Assembly Votes and Proceedings</i>
QPD	<i>Queensland Parliamentary Debates</i>
SAGG	<i>South Australian Government Gazette</i>
SAHAV&P	<i>South Australian House of Assembly Votes and Proceedings</i>
SALCMP	<i>South Australian Legislative Council Minutes of Proceedings</i>
SAPD	<i>South Australian Parliamentary Debates</i>
SAPP	<i>South Australian Parliamentary Papers</i>
SMH	<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>
SRNSW	State Records of New South Wales
THAV&P	<i>Tasmanian House of Assembly Votes and Proceedings</i>
TLCV&P	<i>Tasmanian Legislative Council Votes and Proceedings</i>
TPD	<i>Tasmanian Parliamentary Debates</i>
TPP	<i>Tasmanian Parliamentary Papers</i>
VGG	<i>Victorian Government Gazette</i>
VLAV&P	<i>Victorian Legislative Assembly Votes and Proceedings</i>
VPD	<i>Victorian Parliamentary Debates</i>
VPP	<i>Victorian Parliamentary Papers</i>
VPRS	Victorian Public Records Series
WAGG	<i>Western Australian Government Gazette</i>
WAPD	<i>Western Australian Parliamentary Debates</i>
WAPP	<i>Western Australian Parliamentary Papers</i>



## Preface

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This book is an abridged version of my PhD thesis submitted to the University of Sydney nearly three decades ago. All these years the thesis was lying on shelves collecting dust as my areas of interest and priorities changed. A few years ago, I felt the urge of sharing the contents of the study with a larger audience and enabling them to appreciate contemporary changes in Australian public bureaucracy in the backdrop of changes that started occurring more than one hundred and sixty years ago. It is important to scan the pages of history to perceive why administrative changes occurred in the way they did and what forces were at play in shaping those changes. I therefore decided to give the thesis the shape of a book by thoroughly editing and substantially reducing the original study and making it more focused and readable.

I was particularly interested in exploring the manner in which the formative phase of public administration unfolded in a distant land whose 'colonial' history began only two and a quarter centuries ago. There, 'modern' political and administrative institutions developed in an indigenous social-cultural milieu that had not felt the need for any organized system. The native heterogeneous tribal groups scattered throughout the vast continent followed traditional lifestyles and social relations were based on complex kinship structures and rules. Thus, these institutions had to be created from scratch and were mainly based on British patterns to meet the demands of new and expanding colonies far away from the colonizing country.

More importantly, the six separate colonies that gradually emerged in Australia between 1788 and 1859 presented different approaches in dealing with administrative matters and in constructing their bureaucratic systems to serve growing populations. However, there were similarities in political management, the colonies borrowing from each other's successes and taking lessons from failures as these had implications for administrative development. While political and bureaucratic transformations in each colony have been studied by scholars before, very little effort was made to make an interpretive-comparative study of changes and developments. Thus, this study, to some extent, attempts to fill the gap in comparing colonial administrative patterns and to make a modest contribution to the understanding of Australian administrative history.

Many people encouraged me in my work. First of all, I must express my deep gratitude to my academic mentor, Professor Ross Curnow, now retired from the University of Sydney, for his guidance, counsel and company. His knowledge of and expertise in public administration was inspirational. I also benefitted from the intellectual help of many individuals, too numerous to acknowledge here. However, for their support and many helpful comments, I shall always be indebted to some, many of whom have since retired from academia or passed away: Professors Henry Mayer, Terry Irving and Martin Painter of the Department of Government and Public Administration at the University of Sydney and Dr. Ralph Chapman of the University of Tasmania. I owe a lot to Professors Syed G. Ahmed

and Mohammad M. Khan (both at the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh), late Emeritus Professor Fred Riggs (University of Hawaii) and Professors Gerald Caiden (University of Southern California), Krishna Tummala (then at Montana State University) and Ahmed Shafiqul Huque (now at McMaster University) for their continuous encouragement in my academic endeavours.

My appreciation are for the staff of the state archives, public, parliamentary and some university libraries in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, Queensland and Western Australia who were unfailing in their courtesy and assistance. Thanks to Universal Publishers for producing this book and especially Mr. Jeff Young for his support.

Most of all, I am grateful to my deceased father and my ailing mother for all that they did for me since my childhood. Their contribution towards my intellectual development will always remain immeasurable. I owe more to my wife, Pamela, and my children, Hafiz and Saiqa, than I can express. They have given me the support I always needed in my academic life.

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**Prologue**  
**Setting the Scene**



## **Introduction**

The 19th century was a great epoch in administrative development and change throughout the Western world. The changes that occurred in the structure and processes of public administration and in the pattern of governmental growth as a sequel to the great social, political and economic advances of the late eighteenth and early 19th centuries constituted a kind of 'revolution' (MacDonagh, 1958). Graham Wallas (1908:249), in his *Human Nature in Politics*, claimed that the creation of the non-political, neutral bureaucracy, in particular, was "one great political invention in 19th century England." The concept of depoliticized or neutral bureaucracy, however, was not restricted to the 19th century having "gained strength and vitality in the heyday of absolutism during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" (Argyriades, 1982: 45). Nevertheless, in the first half of the century a break was made with the past and a new form of public bureaucracy emerged in Britain.

This and later trends and innovations in Britain had profound implications for administrative development throughout the British Empire. Australia was no exception. For many years after Australia's founding in the late-1700s, its administrative system was, to a large measure, conditioned by English ideas and practices--some of which were gradually rejected while others adapted to the peculiar Australian situation. In many respects, the administrative system in Australia deviated from some of the basic features of the British 'model'. But generally speaking, Australian reform enthusiasts in the 19th century were inspired, as in the United States, by the reforms in the British Civil Service (BCS).

### **BRITAIN: FROM PATRONAGE TO COMPETITION**

In the aftermath of the 'glorious revolution' of 1689, politics was separated from administration insofar as holders of offices of profit under the Crown (except for ministers) were debarred from entering parliament. This led to another phase in political-administrative history. Public servants now became "pawns in the struggle between Parliament and the King" (Finer, 1937: 31). Patronage and venality became the primary criteria in the recruitment of governmental personnel (Cohen, 1941: 41; Hume, 1981: 52-53). Those who had influence, wealth or connections with the monarchy, the nobility or with those in political power were the ones who could aspire to places in the King's service. As Parris (1969: 22-27) notes, the BCS in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was neither a "service" featuring "a body of full-time, salaried officers, systematically recruited, with clear lines of authority, and uniform rules on such questions as superannuation;" nor "civil" in the sense that the distinction between civil and political offices was still blurred; nor "permanent". By the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century this pattern of recruitment became established, but public opinion began to harden against such practices.

Although recruitment had been centralized by 1823, it was still conducted along patronage lines (Kingsley, 1944: 33). The distinction between political and administrative services remained blurred until the end of the first quarter of the century. Political ministers were involved in much of the administrative work, which in later days was normally carried out by public servants (Young, 1961: 1). On the other hand, many officials performed tasks of a

political nature such as campaigning for prospective candidates during elections (Hughes, 1934: 310). Nevertheless, with the passage of the Reform Bill in 1832 it became more difficult for politicians to provide public jobs to their supporters or protégés. Venality was no longer a viable mode of recruitment; political patronage, on the other hand, became “an important factor in the game of party politics” (Cohen, 1941: 153). Gradually, the idea of a permanent civil service as distinct from the political executive began to develop, and the concept of security of tenure for public officials came to be recognized and upheld (Parris, 1969: 39-40). Some departments developed a system of qualifying examinations for appointment but its application was irregular; by the early 1830s probation became a prerequisite of appointment (Cohen, 1941: 66-67).

After an unsuccessful attempt in 1833, the recruitment process was reformed in the early 1850s. The competitive principle was introduced to select officers for the Indian Civil Service (ICS). Two years’ training in Britain followed success in such examinations (O’Malley, 1965: 241-44). Even in the home civil service some changes were noticeable: the bureaucracy acquired a status distinct from that of politicians and ministers; terms and conditions of employment were streamlined, and tenure was protected (Cohen, 1941: 95-103). However, the seeds of more ‘radical’ reform were sown by the Northcote-Trevelyan Report (NTR) of 1853, which was outspoken in its criticisms of the organization and processes of the service and singled out the influences of patronage in the recruitment of “the unambitious, and the indolent or incapables” in various departments (Northcote & Trevelyan, 1954: 2). Northcote and Trevelyan found the existing safeguards against political, social or personal influences inadequate; security of tenure engendered indolence and impaired efficiency; the ‘seniority’ criterion regulated advancement and promotion; and “rigid departmentalism” led to “the growth of narrow views and departmental prejudices...[that] limit[ed] the acquisition of experience” (*Ibid*, 3-5).

The NTR, considered “strident” and “polemical” in its tone (See, Wright, 1969:xv), espoused certain ideas as the basis of reform: abolishing patronage and recruiting through open competition; distinguishing intellectual and mechanical labor; encouraging hard work and rewarding merit and performance; and doing away with “the fragmentary character” of the service (Northcote & Trevelyan, 1954:5). On its recommendation, a three member Civil Service Commission (CSC) was established in 1855 to recruit entrants to the junior ranks of the service but without the competitive element. Although the establishment of the CSC was said to have made the civil service “a truly public service”, Parris (1969:283) argues that it was really “a sop to the administrative reformers”, for the CSC had limited scope in preventing patronage (Bridges, 1954:318). According to Finer (1937:48), although patronage was restricted by the reforms, it was “not entirely swept away”. Nonetheless, by the end of the 1860s, recruitment procedures were standardized through nominal assessment of candidates’ potential, and the long clamored for pension scheme was introduced.

The year 1870 marked a turning point in the history of administrative reforms in Britain. Open competition was finally introduced to recruit both university-trained men for higher positions and others to junior ranks. Northcote and Trevelyan’s idea to distinguish the ‘intellectual’ from the regular type of work was reflected in the creation of two distinct categories of public servants—an elite cadre and an ordinary corps. This gave the BCS a special character. The notion of central control of the civil service also became a reality with all personnel brought under the Treasury umbrella despite opposition from the “traditionally independent and autonomous” departments (Wright, 1969:170). Through the reforms of



1870, the ideas of Macaulay, Northcote and Trevelyan found acceptance and these were subsequently “elaborated, refined, modified, but never fundamentally altered” (Kingsley, 1944: 78). The Playfair Commission of 1875 only ratified the NTR proposals and the changes that followed in 1870.

Both ideology and pragmatism played an important role in shaping the changes. As one historian observed, the “administrative reform of the 1850's derived essentially from [an] amalgam of Peelism and middle class radicalism” (MacDonagh, 1958: 64). The political ideas of Edmund Burke, William Gladstone and other statesmen, the intellectual reflections of Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Benjamin Jowett and Lord Thomas Macaulay and the pragmatic approach of Sir Stafford Northcote and Sir Charles Trevelyan (to name only a few) were crucial factors in shaping a distinctive British philosophy of civil service reform in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **THE PECULIARITIES OF AUSTRALIAN DEVELOPMENT**

The colonization of Australia began in 1788 with the settlement of New South Wales. Initially a depot for transported convicts, it gradually became the abode of a free population, which came in large numbers from Britain and other parts of Europe with their own ideas, hopes and aspirations. Within 70 years, six separate colonies were established: Tasmania (separated from New South Wales in 1825), South Australia (colonized in 1836), Western Australia (colonized in 1828), and Victoria and Queensland separated from New South Wales in 1850 and 1859 respectively. Until the mid-1850s, the form of government was vice-regal under the direct control of Britain. Quasi-representative political institutions were first introduced in the early 1820s with limited authority over colonial affairs; their status and 'power' were enhanced in 1842 and 1850 in New South Wales, Tasmania, Victoria and South Australia. Responsible rule, granted in 1855-56, afforded these colonies the right to govern themselves. Queensland, upon its separation from New South Wales, followed suit, while Western Australia had to wait until 1890.

The Australian colonies accepted the principal ideas of a non-political and politically subordinate bureaucracy at the advent of responsible government or soon after. These were the notions of ministerial responsibility, neutrality, anonymity and the development of a career service with permanent tenure, prospects of advancement and protection of public servants' rights and privileges. The merit principle in bureaucratic management gained acceptance, albeit slowly, and the Hegelian notion of an 'achievement-oriented' public service in time became a reality (see, Arinesi, 1972:159).

The bureaucracy that gradually developed during the second half of the 19th century was influenced by an egalitarian sentiment in Australian society, social and political homogeneity, a philosophy that encouraged state intervention in economic affairs, a legal-rational approach to administrative problems and practices similar to Weber's 'ideal type', social values that were “essentially capitalist in ethic and materialist in aim” (Caiden, 1965:4), and a largely liberal and, in some cases, radical approach in resolving social, political and economic problems. The character of these colonial bureaucracies reflected an anti-elitist sentiment in society that placed less emphasis on class. The gradual development of a large public sector, because of greater governmental control over resources and utilities, resulted in bureaucratic expansion, while 'state' intervention led to the emergence of and reliance upon statutory bodies outside the public service domain (Encel, 1970: 60; Butlin, 1959: 12, 38, 42; Eggleston,

1931: 24; Hancock, 1930: 118; Wettenhall, 1958: 15-28; Wettenhall, 1963; Rosecrance, 1960: 121, 128; Subramaniam, 1959: 31; Weber, 1947: 329-40). In the absence of an Australian *ancien regime* with its characteristic traditional traits, there was scope for administrative innovation—to adopt new forms of administrative structure and control, procedures and practices. The British influence could not be ignored, for the colonies before the mid-1850s were under British rule and the majority of those who settled in them and were in charge of governmental tasks were British in origin. Although the colonialists adopted the parliamentary form of democracy, for social and economic reasons a concept of the state developed that was distinct in many ways from the pure Westminster model. As Connell and Irving (1980: 32) argue:

For all its influence and the undoubted continuities, the British state was not simply transplanted into Australia. The state as a set of social relations simply cannot be lifted from one state and set down in another—it has to be constructed, or reconstituted in the new conditions. In Australia this construction was undertaken deliberately, using the resources of the British state, and modelled on many of its features, but departing from the mode in a number of ways.

Growing economic prosperity induced large-scale immigration not only from Britain but also from other parts of Europe. The new settlers brought with them different cultures, ideas and beliefs as well as their “equalitarianism and pragmatic experimentalism” (Subramaniam, 1977). These served to crystallize a unique Australian society, in many ways free from British social and cultural inhibitions and taboos.

### **ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS IN AUSTRALIA**

The apparent success of the new form of government launched in the mid-1850s in the Australian colonies, while largely influenced by the sorts of people who occupied positions of political leadership and the way they wielded their authority, and on the workings of parliaments and the force of public opinion, was contingent on the performance of the bureaucracy, however small it was. Responsible government to be effective, had to be accompanied by a systematically organized administrative apparatus working under the dictates of the elected political leadership according to clearly defined norms. Thus, the pattern of administration that developed under the gubernatorial regimes prior to 1855-56 required some fundamental changes (see for details Zafarullah, 1994). There were numerous shortcomings that encompassed both structures and processes. Self-rule thus provided propitious conditions to bring about systematic administrative reform in each colony.

Reform of the political system in Australia in 1855-56 was also accompanied by a 'sentiment' which favored reform of the existing administrative system. That sentiment became stronger after the Northcote-Trevelyan proposals for reform in the BCS became known to reform advocates. Nurtured by public opinion over the years, this sentiment was shared by concerned politicians and public servants and segments of the press. In particular, colonialists were opposed to British patronage that was becoming a norm in the colonial bureaucracies (Gresswell, 1898: 198). In the aftermath of responsible government, this reform 'sentiment' gradually developed into what could be called, in one sense of the term, a continuing reform 'movement'. The term 'movement' as used here implies merely a “series of

actions and endeavors of a body of persons for special object” (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*).

As distinct from a social movement that has as its goal “fundamental changes in the social order” (Heberle, 1951: 6), the administrative reform 'movement' aimed at effective changes in the structure and processes of the machinery of government. Unlike in the United States, in 19th century Australia it did not always denote organized action by any group such as reform leagues or associations, but governmental initiatives (inquiries, legislation and executive action) as well as shifting alliances of some politicians, some public servants and some sections of the press as often as not based on self-interest at the time. Spread over 50 years and gaining momentum during the 1880s and 1890s, this 'movement' led to the foundations of modern bureaucracies in Australia.

More importantly, the needs of the Australian society and polity underwent gradual change during the second half of the 19th century with consequent pressure on governments to undertake activities previously not required. It thus became imperative for the colonies to organize and reorganize their administrative systems at one time or another. Pressure to reform came from within the government or from outside. Public servants sought improved conditions of employment, while the public denounced political patronage and called for greater economy in administration. Although a number of politicians wanted to retain control over patronage, many sought legislative measures to exonerate themselves from public criticism of their management of the public service.

Throughout the world administrative reform in the 19th century dealt solely with the structural-functional aspect of the bureaucracy. Attempts at reform were by and large influenced by the assumption that a public service was purely instrumental in carrying out political decisions. The focus was on the input side of government rather than the output, that is, on questions of organizational purposes and the success with which those purposes were to be met. Very rarely were reform efforts related to the impact of government policies and the interaction of public agencies with society. The quest was for rationality, economy, efficiency and equity. Basically, reform was equated with administrative simplification, the development of merit-based personnel principles to counter political patronage and the introduction of new procedures and methods to improve administrative performance (Mosher, 1965: 137-39; Siedentopf, 1982: ix-xv). A similar trend was evident in Australia; reform was basically structural-procedural that stressed efficient administration to attend to rapid social and economic changes. Despite the differences among the various colonies (for instance, in the character of their foundation or rate of political, social and economic development), a process of administrative development occurred in each where the same sorts of problems and the same or similar interests were at stake. Contextual complexities, as always, were crucial determinants in the success or failure of reform efforts.

## **PUBLIC INQUIRIES AS AN INSTRUMENT OF REFORM**

The system of public inquiries has been regarded as one of the many instruments of government since the 19th century (Caiden, 1969; Dror, 1976: 127; Lippitt, 1973: 38). As Professor Robson (1954:90) remarked, “the public inquiry is a device to ensure that [governments] shall not exercise their vast powers without informing themselves and the public about the true state of affairs”. Or, as Sir Geoffrey Vickers (1965) suggested, public inquiries are utilized by governments to comprehend a situation in its pursuit of action. Their

principal aim is to search for alternative actions to close performance gaps within a bureaucracy (Downs, 1966:191).

Public inquiries in the pursuit of administrative reform were not always established with positive or honest intents; many colonial governments appeared to advance hidden motives. Some merely validated pre-determined government action (Caiden, 1982:227) or attempted “to pacify some politically powerful section of the public” (Cloakie and Robinson, 1937; 123-24). Often, the non-partisan character of inquiries was, in reality, hidden behind a facade of neutrality (Chapman, 1973:9).

Among the different types of reform planning bodies, the royal commission was extensively used in Britain and its colonies including those in Australia in the 19th century. Generally, these commissions were appointed in the name of the Crown on the advice of the government of the day. Unlike other forms (departmental boards or parliamentary select committees, for instance) they enjoyed more formal authority, prestige and status due to their autonomy from other governmental institutions. The legal status granted to them was equal to that of the other primary institutions of government. They were not identified with the government as a whole or with any ministry or department and their membership was not restricted to any specific group unlike select committees, which included only legislators. They were transient establishments created to investigate and recommend a particular problem or set of problems and adjourned *sine die* with the cessation of their activities and the presentation of their reports to the government. Unlike select committees, they did not cease to exist at the end of parliamentary sessions. As they were Crown creations, the warrants of their appointment granted certain *subpoena* powers—for instance, the power to summon individuals to testify before them (Cloakie and Robinson, 1937: 150; see also, Cartwright, 1975; Rhodes, 1975; Hanser, 1965; Chapman, 1973). Many of these characteristics still prevail in Australia today.

The importance of public inquiries as an instrument of administrative reform in colonial Australia depended on a number of factors. The scope and magnitude of an inquiry were determined by the terms of reference and the way they were interpreted and applied. These also markedly influenced a royal commission’s approach to the problems to be investigated. The terms of reference specified what these commissions were supposed to do and to “give all concerned a sense of purpose and urgency” (Donnison, 1968:559). The individuals who constituted a royal commission, their background and experience were important determinants in the quality and significance of a reform plan. Thus their personal characteristics (viz., social standing, prestige, reputation, ingenuity, personality, predilections, profession and attitudes) have had important bearings on the outcome of an inquiry (Caiden, 1969:139). Many inquiries turned out to be exercises in futility because of members’ lack of experience and understanding about the governmental machinery or because of the want of earnestness with which they pursued their task.

In general, as in the present time, administrative reform in 19th century Australia was basically a political process and took place within a colonial polity with elected politicians playing a vital role. The success or failure of reform efforts depended on the political leadership, which often either manifested a positive approach and commitment or was ambiguous and inconsistent in its actions. Often the strength that a commission of inquiry derived from its political linkage as well as the degree of the commitment of the government towards reform in general and its relations with the commission were key determinants. Again, reform efforts that made little improvement in the conditions of public employment

caused a reaction and resulted in the emergence of organized employee activity and generated political pressure for corrective action.

The importance of public inquiries in 19th century administrative development cannot be overstated in spite of the fact that not in every case was their outcome positive. Their significance in administrative history lay in the fact that they were one way of revealing predicaments and identifying problems of existing administrative systems, in synthesizing prevailing views on reform, and in prescribing measures for change. They generally served as an effective stimulus to administrative reform.

Between the advent of responsible government and the initial years of the 20th century when the Australian colonies-turned-states were engaged in adjusting to the administrative effects of federation, there were 15 inquiries into the colonial (state, after federation) bureaucracies—five in Tasmania, three in Victoria, two each in New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia, and one in Queensland. Their sheer number and frequency pose certain questions. What were the events that led to their establishment? What were their implications for administrative development in 19th century Australia? Did they serve the purposes for which they were established? Where did reform ideas come from? What were the reasons for the 'popularity' of inquiries in some colonies at some periods than at others? Why did some colonies defer making inquiries into their public services? Were governments serious and committed in establishing the inquiries or were there any hidden motive behind their creation? How far can such motives be gleaned from the people who were involved and terms of reference they pursued? Who were the people who were entrusted with the task of the inquiries? What methods did the royal commissions adopt in undertaking their tasks? What was the range of questions investigated? What was the nature of the relationship between the principal actors or sets of actors in the reform process? What role did interest groups play? What kind of attitudes did parliaments and the press manifest toward the inquiries? To what extent were commission reports adopted and implemented? What was the short- and long-term impact of implemented reforms? Was there any cross-fertilization among the colonies as far as administrative change was concerned? Were there differences in the way the different colonies approached administrative reform? Answers to some of these questions may help us understand the nature and course of administrative development in Australia during the 19th and early 20th centuries and this is what this book is all about.

## **THE STUDY OF AUSTRALIAN ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY**

Only a few scholars have ventured into one of the largely unexplored periods of Australian administrative history—the second part of the 19th century. Those who did either related 19th century administrative phenomena only in passing or explored developments specific to a single colony. Some of the notable works in these categories are worth mentioning. Parker's *Public Service Recruitment in Australia*, although mainly concerned with the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has one chapter on colonial Australia; so does Caiden's *Career Service*, which makes a succinct comparative analysis of 19th century administrative developments and draws certain tentative generalizations about the course of change. Davison's *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne* presents a brief insight into the Victorian public service of the late-19<sup>th</sup> century. Bland's *Government in Australia*, basically a compilation of documents, has only a few pages on that phase of administrative history. Among the few theses, Knight's is an analytical examination of the New South Wales public service, while Hawker's is a

comprehensive attempt to understand the evolution of public personnel administration in South Australia. Subramaniam's thesis and other writings are specific to the classification and promotion systems in the Australian federal service but draw from 19th century New South Wales and Victorian experiences; Wettenhall looks at statutory corporations as they evolved in the federal sphere but provides insights into 19th century developments in the colonies, while his other writings concentrate on the evolution of the departmental system in Australia. Other scholars like McMartin and Townsley have restricted themselves largely to early 19th century developments (See the Bibliography for reference to these works). More recently, Golder (2005;jacket) has done a colony-specific study, which "locates administrative developments in their social and political context, showing how the administration of New South Wales developed in response to a set of distinctively Australian problems and solutions".

Thus, a dearth of studies on late-19th century Australian administrative developments from a cross-colonial perspective has left a gap in knowledge. As Hume has rightly observed, "Comparative questions, relating to differences among the Australian systems...have been tackled at a few points" (Hume, 1981:157). Such a history is needed; among other things, it would enable generalizations to be made about the origins and nature of reform in the six colonies in 19th century Australia.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THIS BOOK**

A cross-colonial analysis of public service inquiries and the general trend in administrative reform would fill, to some extent, one gap in Australian administrative history. Thus this study is selective rather than exhaustive in its approach. In attempting to understand the nature of the six colonial bureaucracies it concentrates on administrative reform from the vantage point of public service inquiries, for much that occurred in 19th century administrative history could be understood and appreciated from that perspective. It does not seek to analyze all public inquiries into colonial administration; rather the focus is on those inquiries, which examined the public service as a whole and dealt with questions of structure and personnel practices in the six colonies between 1856 and 1904. Each of the 15 inquiries is examined to draw some conclusions about the origins and nature of administrative change during the last century. It attempts to elucidate in some detail the considerations that governed the administrative reform process during the period.

### **PLAN OF THE BOOK**

The administrative reform 'movement' is chronologically followed to give a better comprehension of events. The book is divided into three main parts: adapting to responsible government (1856-1869); the patronage syndrome (1870-1882); and the era of change (1883-1905). Within these, there are several chapters. Chapter 2 examines the administrative changes that accompanied the advent of responsible government. This serves as a background to the changes of the second half of the 19th century. Chapters 3 to 5 analyze the immediate post-responsible government period up to the end of the 1860s. It was during this period that the impact of the political changes was most keenly felt and adjustments were made to cope with emergent administrative problems. Chapters 6 and 7 explore the colonial bureaucracies

as they consolidated their position between 1870 and early 1880s--a relatively quiet period when the momentum of the reform 'movement' receded considerably although the reforms of Britain did stir agitation for change. The last period presented in Chapters 8 to 13 stretches from 1883--the year Victoria and the United States brought about major reforms in their bureaucracies--to the early years of the 20th century. It was a period when the reform 'movement' reached its apogee and significant changes were attempted in the patterns of public administration in Australia. The study is concluded in Chapter 14.

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**Responsible Government and  
the New Administrative Order**

The advent of responsible government in Australia during 1855-56 was a major turning point in its administrative history. New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania—the four colonies with limited forms of representative government—embarked on a new political course that was distinctively different in both method and intent from the previous gubernatorial system.<sup>1</sup> In each a new system of government based on the “principles of well-regulated freedom” as implied by the Australian Colonies Government Act of 1950, was put into operation.<sup>2</sup> A few years later, Queensland, upon its separation from New South Wales, followed suit, while Western Australia, still to attain the same level of political and economic development, had to wait another thirty five years before its demands for responsible government were heeded to.

The new political system involved the substitution for a Crown colonial system of administration by one controlled by the representatives of the people. The locus of executive power in each colony now shifted from the vice-regal authority of the governor to a political executive responsible to a democratically elected legislature. This was to cause the emergence of an entirely new pattern of political and administrative relationships among several actors – between the executive and legislative branches, between the titular governor and his ‘responsible’ ministers, between the political and administrative arms of the government, and, last but not least, between the two legislative chambers. These relationships, novel as they were in the Australian context, assumed different forms in each of the six colonies with varying implications for colonial public administration.

Although responsible government in itself did not imply an increase in governmental functions, the gates to enter new fields and undertake new tasks in order to develop the basic physical infrastructure of the colonies, to ensure continued settlement of a growing population, and to tap the natural resources of a largely unexplored interior, were now open to the colonial governments. To undertake such initiatives, the creation of new agencies became imperative while existing ones needed reorganization to efficiently and economically handle the wide array of governmental activities.

**FEATURES OF THE NEW SYSTEM**

The political system adopted by each Australian colony in the mid-1850s was a derivative of the Westminster model: the Crown being represented by a nominated governor with powers largely ceremonial, a representative parliament with law-making powers; and an executive directly responsible to the legislature. The constitutional frameworks in the different colonies were remarkably similar in establishing the general principles of parliamentary democracy. However, there were significant differences in the way the legislators in each were to be chosen, the nature of the suffrage, and tenure of parliaments (Keith, 1928:55-8; Jenks, 1895: 238-39; Lumb, 1965:22-34).



A bicameral legislature was created in each colony<sup>3</sup> with the lower house (Assembly) given wide legislative powers including the sole right to initiate all money bills, while the upper chamber (Council) basically was to act as a countervailing force “to check the impetuosity or the unduly undemocratic tendency of the popular Assembly” (Wood, 1933:276). In New South Wales and Queensland, the governors nominated the councils; elsewhere, they were elected by property holders. The lower houses were popularly elected by ‘manhood’ suffrage, initially limited by property qualifications in all colonies except South Australia, which was also the first to limit the term of its parliament to three years. Other colonies began with quinquennial parliaments but gradually converted to the triennial system in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT AND THE COLONIAL BUREAUCRACY**

Although responsible government, signified as “government by the advice of ministers chosen from and responsible to the Legislature” (Melbourne, 1963:276), was the essence of the new system, none of the colonial Constitutions made explicit reference to it (Henderson, 1960: 10; Cramp, 1913: 58; Jenks, 1891: 206-07). According to Melbourne (1963: 429-30), their framers made no “special efforts...to give expression to the principles of responsible government” and perhaps thought that the “operation of responsible government should be established on accepted precedent rather than on statutory definition,” enforced and “made effective on the basis of understanding or convention.” South Australia, however, made a more determined effort to embody the principles and write into its Constitution the doctrine of responsible government.<sup>4</sup>

In the new scheme, the cabinet emerged as the pivot around which the whole governmental machinery would revolve. Although none of the colonial Constitutions provided for the establishment of such a body, let alone defining its role, its political significance under a parliamentary form of government going along the British pattern could not be over-emphasized. Its creation was not formally required by law, and while constitutionally all executive authority was vested in the executive council presided over by the governor, from a political point of view it was the cabinet composed of all responsible ministers of the Crown<sup>5</sup> that would actually hold the reins of power and run the government. It would control the governmental machine of the colony and be answerable to parliament for its actions.

In theory, all ministerial appointments would continue to be made in the name of the Queen. But, in reality, such appointments would no longer endure at her pleasure but would be contingent upon the interplay of political forces. Thus, as distinct from previous practice, holding ministerial office would now depend upon parliamentary support for the government of the day.

Practically, the ‘highest’ policy-making body in each colony—the executive council—was to play a purely formal and nominal role. Its primary purpose would be to give legal force to all predetermined decisions of ministers taken either individually or collectively at the departmental or cabinet level. Also, as ministers invariably were to be members of that council, the disposal of business brought before it was a mere formality for decisions already taken were hardly ever to be deliberated, let alone debated. As one historian observed, the executive council was to take “action as the legal personality of Cabinet” (Townsend, 1956:257). The leader of the group constituting the cabinet would be the head of the government and serve as the principal link between the legislature and the executive.<sup>6</sup>