

MEMORANDUM FOR THE CABINET
BY THE HON. PRIME MINISTER

Promotion claims by Customs Officers

The Malta Customs Federation and the Customs and Excise Officers Association have submitted a memorandum in which they claim that grades they represent - Customs grades in the Customs and Port Department - ought to have wider prospects of promotion. Broadly, their memorandum may be divided into two parts, namely, a description of duties performed by officers of the two outdoor branches of the Customs and Port Department, and a case for making available to these officers the full range of posts in the administration of the Department - including the headship.

2. On the duties, as such, no comments are called for, except, perhaps, that these are important and involve responsibility besides containing an undoubted executive element.

3. The claim that these officers should be eligible for promotion to administrative posts in the Department is based on two main arguments, which are:

- (a) They are "executive" officers and as such they ought to be entitled to promotion to headship like general service Executive Officers.
- (b) By comparison with the Police, Education and Public Works Department, the headship of the Customs and Port Department ought to be reserved for Customs Officers.

4. The joint views of the Under Secretary (Ests.) and the Comptroller of Customs on the matter are stated in paras.5 to 12.

5. With regard to (a) in para.3 above, general service Executive Officers are recruited expressly for the purpose of being groomed for eventual administrative duties. They have to pass a stiff public examination, and, afterwards, the duties they are detailed on - often in a number of different departments or branches thereof - throughout perhaps fifteen years or more, are what one may consider to be the most appropriate training for eventual promotion to administrative posts. It is pertinent to point out that, after passing their entry test and receiving the necessary training over the years, not all general service recruits - at Executive Officer level - become suitable for administrative duties and many finish their civil service career without ever making the grade of Administrative Officer.

6. Had Executive Officers been considered eligible for promotion for administrative and headship posts purely on the strength of their being posted on "executive" duties, (a) in para.3 above would, perhaps, have been valid. This, however, is not the case. Unlike Customs Officers -

/recruited ..

recruited expressly for duties in particular departmental posts - general service Executive Officers get ample opportunities during their "executive" years to obtain a wide-angle view of departmental and all-service administrative machinery at work. As a result, their suitability for most of the administrative posts in Government service can hardly be questioned.

7. With regard to (b) of para. 3 above, the comparison with two of the Departments mentioned, Police and Public Works, is out of place. The Commissioner of Police, at the head of a force with para-military training, of necessity has to be a police officer or a person who has held senior military posts. The Director of Public Works, as the head of a Department run mainly by professional officers - engineers and architects - is not out of place as a professional officer himself.

8. In the case of the Education Department, no hard and fast rule is known whereby the Director has to be a teacher by profession. A situation may arise where an outsider may be considered for headship in that Department. Precedents for such a situation existed when the Education Department was headed by Dr. A.V. Laferla who was not a professional teacher, and when Major J.A. Galizia, who was not a Civil Engineer, was Director of Public Works.

9. Indeed, no headship in government service is known to be reserved - in the strict sense of the word - for any particular grade or class of employees. For the filling of administrative and headship posts, the best interests of the service are the supreme consideration, and, in the choice - of class, grade and officer - everything, including accepted norms, is completely subordinated to such a consideration.

10. Experience (as claimed by Customs Officers) is a word widely used in support of claims for promotion openings. In truth, experience may serve as the basis on which may be built a general ability to tackle certain duties. There is a vast difference between experience that may be expected to turn a good recruit into a good "executive" and experience that is carefully aimed at broadening an officer's outlook in a way that - granted resourcefulness, adaptability, mental ability and sound character - he is gradually transformed from an "executive" recruit into a potential administrative officer.

11. Officers represented by the Malta Customs Federation and the Customs and Excise Officers Association joined, out of their own free will, a departmental class whose prospects of promotion they were aware of. (They themselves argue that, when they so joined, their salaries had a different relation from what they have now to the salaries of other grades /like Police Officers, Graded Clerks, etc. / That is a "relativity" plea, and is outside the scope of this memorandum.) Other young men joined the Customs Officers ranks as a stepping stone and eventually took the Executive Officers examination. A good percentage of passes in this examination is, in fact, being obtained by young Customs Officers who, no doubt, have taken the right step when their enthusiasm and enterprise induced them to aspire for senior Civil Service appointments.

12. It would appear that, as a general rule, the person who is content to fill a relatively junior post, carrying limited prospects of advancement, gradually but easily cultivates a mentality where he becomes too glad to have his activities mapped out for him and where all he has to do is to follow instructions. It can not be in the best interest of the service to build protective enclosures in a particular department for any class of employees who can - but do not - compete for posts carrying better promotion prospects and whose initiative, at best, can only induce them to seek advancement solely in their immediate sphere.

13. The views of the Under Secretary (Ests.) and the Comptroller of Customs outlined above, would appear to be valid. A way is not seen whereby these unions may have their claims accepted without grave disturbance of established promotion norms, and also without exposing to peril the smooth functioning of the Customs and Port Department in particular and the entire service in general. Above all, no administration can commit itself and successive administrations to a hard and fast rule of promotion to senior posts in any Government Department nor can a trade dispute arise in this matter which falls entirely within the prerogative of management.

14. There is information that provisional approval has been given for the inclusion in the 1965/66 General Estimates of four additional posts of Senior Officer in the Customs and Port Department. This will bring the number of Senior Officer posts in the Department from 11 to 15, excluding, of course, two posts of Chief Officer (Landing and Warehousing and Customs and Excise). The promotion prospects of Junior Officers and Officers - there are 113 posts - should become correspondingly better as a result.

15. The Cabinet is invited to agree that the difficulties precluding acceptance of the claims under review should be tactfully explained to the unions concerned, who should be reminded that the measure outlined in the next preceding paragraph should appreciably enhance promotion prospects in the Department.

19th January, 1965.