

INTRODUCTION

Apparently, in the Statutory Authorities, things have never been worse. The picture is most vivid in the case of WASA, the largest and most politically sensitive statutory authority. WASA has proved itself incapable of quenching the nation's thirst. In 1973, it was said that the water crisis was on the verge of being solved. In January 1976, it was estimated that water production amounted to 66 million gallons per day while demand stood at 85 million gallons per day in the wet season and 95 million gallons per day during the dry season, a shortfall of between 19 and 29 million gallons per day during the respective seasons.

Metcalf and Eddy had hoped that the first stage of that "old chestnut," the Northern Oropouche Scheme, could be completed by 1977. A minister and other officials of Government visited the project in early 1977. The press reported that the scheme would shortly yield 20 million gallons a day; the photograph accompanying the story of that historic trip showed two men, one hand pump, a length of hose and two oil drums. "Now that's what is called optimism."¹

In March 1977, Mervyn Sankeralli, Acting Technical Director of WASA, said that by the end of 1979 the country would have 20 million gallons from the North Oropouche system and that by 1980, the entire water problem would have been overcome - at least for another 50 years - with the coming

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Ellen Drew, *Sunday Guardian*, April 3, 1977.

into commission of the Caroni-Arena system capable of producing 60 million gallons per day.¹ In early January 1978, the Minister warned the country that they ^{might} have to pray for rain, but apparently realizing that prayer had failed, he announced that it was time to start thinking of importing water.² The fear was expressed that there may be water riots, and one individual felt that the name of the Authority should be changed to NWASA - No Water and Sewerage Authority. There was flooding of intakes in the Arima region in the dry season in April 1979 and WASA announced that the water supply would be interrupted.³

These are bits of the WASA "horror story." On the inauguration of a new Minister of Public Utilities in 1973, WASA had warned of the problems ahead. These problems, it noted, ranged from "the frustration of consumers who still experience water shortages to the disgust of the public, who, time and again, have complained of delay in effecting repairs to burst mains."⁴

The Authority was aware, too, that its image had been tarnished at every street corner in the country; that a "credibility gap" had developed between itself and the public and that there was an attitude of hostility to WASA workers and itself.⁵

¹ *Trinidad Guardian*, March 27, 1977.

² Editorial, *Ibid*, January 19, 1978.

³ News Broadcast, Radio Trinidad, 7.45 p.m. April 10, 1979.

⁴ *WASA Review*, Vol. 6, No.3, Sept/Oct. 1973
WASA also complained of the complacency with which water is wasted everywhere despite appeals by the Authority

⁵ *WASA Review*, Vol.8, No.5, Christmas Issue 1976.

In similar light, the docks have been referred to as "the world's greatest circus of stupidity and inefficiency"¹ and a "comic strip" that would make "riotous reading".² The PTSC has become "a tragedy on wheels"³ and the nation has joined chorus to Penguin's calypso "TELCO Poops". The Telephone Users Group complained that the service provided by this company "is and continues to be poor in quality, intermittent, unreliable and unsatisfactory and the company has failed to fulfill its statutory obligations in this respect."⁴

"My telephone is an embarrassment," said one member of the Public Utilities Commission, and it is "the instrument of exploitation which is used to defraud me of hard earned income in return for very indifferent service..."⁵ The Company itself acknowledged that the quality of the telephone service to the nation "leaves a great deal to be desired."⁶ One newspaper ran a complaints column on the "telephone blues" of users of telephones and today, almost a full page, is devoted to those whose telephones are out of order. This page is used by telephone operators in many firms as a mini-directory of "dead lines."

¹ R.S. Jones, "Political Periscope, The Circus that is the City Docks," in Express, Jan. 11, 1979.

² Percy Dyer in Trinidad Guardian, Aug. 11, 1978.

³ Joe Young in Trinidad Guardian, Oct. 14, 1976.

⁴ Public Utilities Commission. Hearing in the matter of the claim of the Trinidad and Tobago Telephone Company Limited, 1973. TELCO vs the Telephone Users Group. Hearing dated 7/1/74.

⁵ Trinidad Guardian, May 11, 1971.

⁶ Express, Oct. 28, 1971.

Something has gone radically wrong. The Statutory Authorities provide mainly essential social services and necessarily become a testing ground for the efficiency of the public sector at large. The onus is upon the Government to get to the heart of the problem which involves the efficiency and attitudes of those who work in these bodies, from the ordinary labourer right up to the board of commissioners, weaknesses in the structure of the organisations themselves, the various bureaucratic constraints to which these organisations are subjected, the deficiencies of top management and the attitude of the Government itself towards these organisations.