



The gentlemen at work

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In the 1950s, Pakistan experienced poor growth and rapid political turnover. In the 1960s, the country became a model of growth in the eyes of the donors. Gustav Papanek, then the head of the Harvard Advisory Group, wrote a book, *Pakistan's Development* (1967) to explain the process and the factors leading to this growth story. In his view, it was a successful blend of private initiative and government intervention in the economy. In a chapter “Gentlemen at Work”, he brings out the role played by the bureaucracy in the self-styled Decade of Development. We summarize this chapter for readers to put the need for civil service reform in perspective.

It is difficult to examine government economic policies and their effectiveness without some understanding of Pakistan's civil service. The government of Pakistan was dominated by the civil service. Until 1958, the political leadership changed, civil servants participated frequently in the cabinet. After 1958 the civil service and the military were dominant even at the political level of government. Usually power, prestige, and competence lay with the civil service, not with the political leadership. The Pakistan civil service was shaped in the pre-Independence period. Its most prominent component was and is a very small group of general administrators who held practically all senior positions- an elite in the true sense of the world. In the late 1950's some 400 of them administered a country of 100 million. Those elites were selected on the basis of a competitive examination in their early twenties. The candidates must be well adjusted, intelligent, all around and participate in the sports and respond quickly on a wide range of subjects were more important than a deep knowledge of a few fields. His pay and benefits were 50 percent higher than those of his college classmates who joined the government but not the elite services. One year he was concerned with personal policy, the next with the agricultural development and a few years later with price controls. His rank, influence, and specific function deepened primarily on seniority though actual performance and specific aptitudes were also taken into account. The result of this process of selection, training, experience, and promotion was the generalist par excellence, an educated gentleman, who made a remarkably fine civil servant. His greatest strength was in fields requiring a minimum of technical knowledge and a maximum of administrative ability. Great responsibilities at an early age made for self-confidence, decisiveness and an ability to work hard of great importance when a tiny group administers the affairs of a large and compels country. The weakness and limits of this selection and training process was inflexibility and technical knowledge

which they could not possess. The selection and promotion process were poorly adapted to deal with extremes in ability. The generalists occupying all important positions had to make decisions which increasingly required technical knowledge they could not possess. Self-confidence and prestige often not enough for the technical staffs. The bulk of the civil service was less effective and more corrupt knowing that almost regardless of performance, they were unlikely to be appointed to senior positions. The second main problem was that the civil service was out of touch with people's aspirations and not very effective in mobilizing widespread support. This was the result of the elite's self-contained, self-confident characteristics, its contempt of politics and politicians, and its isolation from the political process in a country where political organizations were in any case rather ineffective. In 1958 the newly installed military government brought changes in the civil service, as elsewhere. Some officers were assigned to civilian tasks, though most returned to military functions after a year or two. Unlike previous governments, it fired a few officials accused of dishonesty or inefficiency. It reorganized the administrations and changed policy, even if the changes were opposed by the civil service. Not all innovations were beneficial, but on the whole the civil service, public or private, became more effective. From 1949-1950 to 1964-65 gross government investment more than doubled every 5 years in real terms. With this rapid increase in the size of the government investment program, efficiency might be expected to decline. There is no conclusive evidence, and very little that is even convincing, on what happened to the efficiency of or to the return from government investment over time. One can find the usual horror stories, inevitable in any large organization when the capacity of the government to carry out investment programs increased very rapidly, probably even more rapidly than the size of the programs themselves, which more than doubled every 5 years. There were a number of reasons for this. First, several government organizations were quite well staffed and organized from the beginning. As they recovered from the initial disorganization following independence and partition.

They learned to use increasing amounts of capital effectively. The railways were a prime example. Second, there were a number of investments which required little technical knowledge, administration, or suitable institutions. A good example was the construction of a power station with imported machinery, which required only a handful of technicians and presented no complex organizational problems. Third, executing capacity was expanded rapidly in some fields by the use of foreign technicians. The Pakistan government was willing to use foreigners to a considerable extent, especially in the 1960's such specialized and unique investments as the laying of a

pipeline were entrusted entirely to foreigners. Fourth, the effect of a rising rate of investment on executing capacity was an important point that is often overlooked. In the very short run, the higher the rate of investment, the more strain there is on existing manpower and organization, and therefore the less is the direct economic efficiency of investment. At the same time, however, there is no education so rapid and practical as the responsibility for carrying through an investment project. For a variety of political and economic reasons, the investment program always somewhat bigger than the government could carry out comfortably. As a result, there was continuous pressure for more and better people from agencies that were already shorthanded, from foreign sources of funds for the better use of aid, from the political leadership for better organization in order to carry out a program to which they were committed. These and other pressures resulted in a considerable decentralization of responsibility, the establishment of semi autonomous government agencies with greater flexibility on personnel and other policies and considerable departure from seniority in order to place the abler civil servants in positions where they could do the most good. This process was accelerated in the 1960's by the firm leadership. Government organization is far from perfect but definitely much improved as a result of the pressure exerted by a rapidly rising rate of investment.

