Technocrats and the Generalist Mystique

Physicians, Engineers, and the Administrative System of Pakistan

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During the summer of 1982 junior staff physicians participated in work slowdowns at various hospitals throughout Pakistan. Their demands—to upgrade the status and the terms and conditions of employment for government physicians—were reminiscent of demands voiced most stridently by engineers and seconded by physicians thirteen years earlier during the so-called "Disturbances of 1968-9". Clearly, these two events were not isolated incidents, nor were their similarities coincidental; rather, they were a product of the long-simmering grievances of technocrats with the administrative system of Pakistan. This paper attempts to explain the causes of these grievances, to trace their expression, and to describe the Government's response to the resultant demands. To approach this task the paper serially addresses four relevant questions: (1) Why are the technocrats upset? (2) What did the technocrats want in 1968-9? (3) What did the technocrats get as a consequence of the reforms of 1973? And, (4) What do the technocrats still want in 1982?

I. Why are the Technocrats Upset? Characteristics and Outcomes of the Administrative System of Pakistan

A discussion of the role or status of technocrats in Pakistan is inextricably linked with the norms and structures of the bureaucracy of which such technocrats are a part. Therefore, a fruitful point of departure for this paper is a discussion of the dominant characteristics of the administrative system of Pakistan. In broad strokes there are three such characteristics: (a) The secretariat system of bureaucratic authority, (b) the systemic preference for generalists, and (c) the cadre system of organization. We will look at these in turn.
(a) The Secretariat System of Bureaucratic Authority

Under the terms of the Constitution of 1972, the Government of Pakistan has a ministerial form of organization. At last count (1982) there were nineteen ministries, each of which contains one or more administrative "divisions". Typically each division is composed of a central secretariat, the appropriate attached departments, and the "autonomous" and/or "semi-autonomous" organizations affiliated with the division. For example, the Establishment Division, part of the ministry-level Cabinet Secretariat, is composed of a central secretariat in Islamabad, several attached departments, the most prominent of which are the Federal Service Tribunal and the All-Pakistan Administrative Research Centre, and several autonomous bodies including the Pakistan Administrative Staff College and the Civil Services Academy. There is no ironclad rule which defines the relationship between attached departments or autonomous organizations and their respective central secretariat. For the most part, however, autonomous organizations are more independent of their parent secretariat than attached departments. Usually directors of the former are directly responsible to the Secretary of the division, while heads of attached departments are usually responsible to secretariat officers subordinate to the Secretary. Also, autonomous organizations are usually larger than attached departments. However, in practice one finds numerous exceptions to both of these rules.

The combined strength of attached departments and autonomous organizations dwarf the respective sizes of the central secretariats. The latest available data indicates that a total of 13,062 public servants worked in the parent organizations of the federal secretariat in 1980, while 108,091 worked in analogous attached departments [GOP, O + M Division: 1981: 27-56] and as many as 185,841 (1975) worked in autonomous or semi-autonomous organizations. [GOP, O + M Wing:1975] Moreover, compared to attached departments and autonomous or semi-autonomous organizations, the central secretariat employs proportionately more officer-level employees. In 1980, 22 percent of the employees of the central secretariat held posts at National Pay Scale (NPS) Grade 17 or above, while comparable percentages for attached departments were 3 percent and for autonomous organizations (1975) 9 percent. [GOP, O + M Division:1981; GOP, O + M Wing:1975]

As this structure of organization indicates, the administrative system of Pakistan firmly adheres to the conceptual dichotomy between staff and line officers. Ideally, staff officers, (secretariat officers), provide the policy direction for programs, assess the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of these programs, modify the scope of given programs, take ultimately the final responsibility for personnel decisions and training of officers, serve as the liaison between administrative institutions within the bureaucracy, and act as the conduit through which political control is exercised. Line officers, (officers in attached departments and autonomous organizations), on the other hand, execute the programs which the staff officers introduce. Or as bureaucrats in Pakistan are likely to state: "Staff officers are the head and line officers are the body".