

PATRONAGE AND MERIT SYSTEM*

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The author of this article wishes to point out how patronage and merit systems are usually practiced in the selection of personnel in the public service; how these systems are used; and whether they have anything to offer modern public administration.

The characteristics of patronage systems and merit systems as described by Marjorie Tallman, John M. Pfiffner, O. Glenn Stahl and Joseph B. Kingsbury were analysed. The author summarizes that the features of a merit system are as follows:

1. security of tenure;
2. the rule of competence;
3. political neutrality; and
4. equality of opportunity and equal treatment.

Patronage systems prevailed in England until 1855 when the British government established a civil service commission and a competitive examination system. In the United States, the Congress passed the Pendleton Act of 1833 which banned the patronage system from the federal government. The spoils system is still dominant in many of the State governments, however.

The first Thai civil service law came into being under the auspices of King Rama VII (Prachathipok) in 1928. The law established a civil service commission to control and supervise civil servants in all government ministries. Previously each ministry administered its own system. Thailand was still an absolute monarchy when the civil service law was first introduced, but the principle of merit in the public service was supported by the King. Thus the decision to adapt a merit system came from the ruler, unlike similar decisions in Great Britain and the United States. In these two countries the government had to yield to the insistent demand for reform by the people.

The characteristics of the Thai merit system (to 1954) are as follows:

1. provides for applicants' qualifications;
2. provides for open competitive examinations;

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3. selection from those receiving highest grades;
4. provides for a probationary period preceeding permanent appointment;
5. promotion in accord with competence;
6. provides security of tenure; and
7. places civil servants under the control and supervision of a civil service commission.

Nevertheless, the patronage system is still legally exercised in some parts of the Thai civil service. Some political positions at ranks below the minister level can be appointed and dismissed in accordance with political preferences. Civil servant's promotion from first class to special class depends upon the decision of the minister and the Council of Ministers.

The appointment of civil servants is an important aspect of public administration because it has direct influence on the efficiency of the public service. Competent persons are obviously needed, especially those who are in the career service. So the best and proper way to select efficient civil servants is to adhere to the merit system although political considerations are necessary in appointing high level policy making executives. In the United States, the Second Hoover Commission Report proposed that non-career executives should be selected by the in-power political party. However it is still hard to analyse or to distinguish between political jobs and career positions in governmental agencies.

The author concludes that both systems are good in their own way. Governments should use both wisely, so as to select the right man for the right job.

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