

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

WDF - 3
Jhelum District

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The Mall
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Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

All Pakistan is divided into two parts, or, if you prefer, into a quarter of a million villages and a sprinkling of cities---only 11 cities of over 100,000 population. But the basic unit of public administration is the district, of which West Pakistan has 49 and East Pakistan has 17. Roughly, the district would have its American equivalent in the county.

Earlier this month I accompanied Phil Talbot to Jhelum District in the northern Punjab, where we spent a four days' visit talking to officials, clerks and villagers. Among the delights of touring in the countryside were (1) trying to match up the 1956 roads with the latest map, which was published in 1931, and (2) trying, in the bathless bathroom of a barren rest-house, to transform a bucketful of lukewarm water and a bar of soap into a hot bath.

On the map, Jhelum district looks like a sway-backed rectangle 70 from east to west and 30 to 40 miles from north to south. The broad River Jhelum, flowing down from its source in the Vale of Kashmir, forms the southern border of the district. The bolder-strewn, eroded hills of the Salt Range, 1000 to 3000 feet high, run along the east border of the district, then dog-leg west to lie parallel to the river on its northern bank. North of the Salt Range lies a broad, parched plateau.

Less than half of the district's 2768 square miles are cultivated, for the only water for crops---the wheat and oil seeds and pulses---comes from scanty rains and too-few wells. The 680,000 people who live in the district are poor, for the Punjab, and if they had to depend on farming for their livelihood they would be poorer than they are. Instead, Jhelumites have looked to the Army, and a career as a soldier provides the young men with escape from the dreariness of the farm and furnishes thousands of families with allotment and pension checks that have raised considerably their meager incomes. "Soldiers are our main crop here," we were told. "There is scarcely a family in the district without a son or uncle or someone in the Army."

The capital of the district is Jhelum city, with 30,000 inhabitants. Before Partition, Jhelum was a lumbering town, and timber from the forests of Kashmir were floated down the river to the plains. Now the border is closed and the trade is stopped, and the city is the poorer for it.

Our first stop was in the compound of the district headquarters.

Standing on the left was a one-story plastered-brick building bearing the sign "English Office," a relic from British Empire days. At the main door a curtain of rush-matting kept out the heat, the flies and intruders. In the courtyard was fixed a huge banyan tree, its aerial roots drooping, and in its shade sat a score of pleaders and scribes, a depot of legal talent for litigants with business in the court-halls on the far side of the yard.

The man in charge of all this, the Deputy Commissioner---the "D.C. Sahib"---was "out of station," out on tour. This we were told in much the same reverential terms, I thought, as those left behind in some medieval castle would give the word, "The King has gone a-hunting." Whatever personal qualities the D.C. had, the office itself has been one of authority and prestige. Since British days, the D.C. has been "the Government in person," the key link between villagers and the Government. For the Government, he has been the collector of revenue, the defender of peace, the dispenser of justice. For the people, he has been the number one representative of the Government and regarded as responsible, in a general way, for their well-being. The post was customarily filled, in the old days, by a gazetted officer of the elite Indian Civil Service, the "I.C.S." A "posting" as a D.C. would come for a civil servant in about his tenth through thirteenth years of service, and it was regarded as a valuable grass-roots schooling in government and a responsible position as well.

Now, in the D.C.'s office, the administrative superintendent, a veteran of those good old days---he had worked for the Government since 1927---told us sourly that things had changed. "Now we get D.C.'s after three years," he exclaimed, flinging both hands outward in a "what-are-you-going-to-do?" gesture. "Young boys scarcely out of university. We are fortunate here, with an older man, but he is so busy, like all of them... Now there is no public contact for the D.C.---he dashed out of the headquarters and then back... There is more work and less efficiency ... And they transfer so rapidly. We have had five or six D.C.'s in eight years---the present one has been here only three months." He had more to say, complaints that there had been no increase in the size of the D.C.'s staff despite increased functions, and a protest that the pay---his pay---was so low as to be "impossible." "I tell you frankly," he went on, "there is gross dissatisfaction, and resort to illegal means. The starting pay is 60 rupees a month plus 30 'dearness allowance.' Why, you can't keep your bones within your body!"

It was the following morning at eight that we drove out to the D.C.'s house hoping to have a talk with him. We had been told that he had come in from his trip late the night before and had to be off again that afternoon. A bearer ushered us into a living room and we waited.

Abdul Qayam, the D.C., is in his early thirties, stocky, pleasant, with a steady, serene eye. A Punjabi by birth, he took an M.A. in educational psychology at the University in Lahore in 1943 and entered the old I.C.S. the following year. He had been in the first batch of the Civil Service of Pakistan, the "C.S.P.," successor to the I.C.S. in Pakistan, so that now he is quite senior in the corps now numbering about 300. In his last assignment as a Provincial Cabinet secretary he had gained himself a nervous breakdown, he told us, and now, after a three-month rest, had become D.C. in Jhelum "because they said this was one of the 'quiet' districts."

It became apparent, however, as Abdul Qayam told us about his job, that there was a lot doing. The traditional functions of the D.C.--- maintaining law and order and collecting revenue---remain basic; they are his prime responsibilities. To do these assignments he has some ---"but not enough"---staff assistants: for his judicial duties, which include primary and appellate jurisdiction, there is an "additional magistrate" in the headquarters; there is an "assistant revenue officer" with authority to be the stand-in for the D.C.'s tax-collecting role. Headquartered also in the D.C.'s compound are the "technical heads" of departments: the inspector of police, the health officer, the chief engineer, the inspector of schools, the local government officer, the assistant registrar of co-operatives and the like. Out in the western half of the district, two sub-divisions were under the supervisory control of lower-rung civil servants with general powers.

Since Partition, in addition to its traditional functions, district administration has entered two new spheres. "The old Government," Abdul Qayam explained, "wanted only law and order. Now there is great emphasis on welfare and development. Oh, there may have been welfare and development projects in the old days, but it depended on the particular D.C. Now it is a Government matter, and all my time is devoted to these activities---building roads and hospitals, schools, tanks [village storage ponds], supervising local boards in their development projects, procuring and distributing food and sugar to the needy, and what-not."

The new emphasis on welfare and development that the D.C. spoke of is part of a Governmental effort devoted to "raising the general standard of living of the common man and the development of a welfare state." These aims are embodied in the "First Five Year Plan, 1955-60." Drafted during the past three years and now slated for final approval in January, it is in many respects already under way.

The principal objectives of the Plan are "to raise the national income and the standard of living of the people; to improve the balance of payments of the country by increasing exports and by production of substitutes for imports; to increase the opportunities for useful employment in the country; to make steady progress in providing social services, housing, education, health and social welfare; and to increase rapidly the rate of development, especially in East Pakistan and other relatively less-developed areas."

The main targets of the Plan include: two million new jobs, a 13 per cent increase in the harvest of foodgrains, a seven per cent increase in farmlands through new irrigation projects, extension of the Village Aid program to 26,000 more villages, a quarter-million new housing units, an increase in hospital beds from 23,000 to 32,000, the building of new schools, and the like. The cost of implementing the Plan will be an estimated Rs. 11.6 billion. (According to the official exchange rate, one rupee equals 21 U.S. cents.) This is big money in Pakistan, where, for example, the over-all budget of the Central government this year is only Rs. 1.3 billion.

I mention the Plan because already it is impressing itself on the life of Jhelum district. As we drove through the countryside we passed over and around miles of new roads under construction, we saw dozens of new schools---always the newest building in a village---and we were taken on tours by village headmen to inspect a new brick-lined drainage system or community seed-farm. At district headquarters, the D.C. is chairman

of a newly organized Development Board composed of himself and his technical heads. Their function is to initiate and supervise development schemes and projects---sanitation and drainage projects, improvement of roads, the building of health centers, prevention of erosion, and the like.

But the D.C. spoke of these things with no particular zeal. "There are no funds for these schemes," he said, "not on our level. Now funds are available at Division (there are ten divisions in West Pakistan, each comprising four to seven districts), but only Rs. 600,000 a year. For all the bigger schemes, the allocation must come from the Government."

Couldn't many development projects be worked with community muscle-power, without the need for sizable funds? Yes, but the stumbling-block here is the lack of initiative in the towns and villages, the absence of a sense of community spirit, the general debility of impoverished farmers, and the reluctance to delegate authority. "You'll laugh at this," the D.C. smiled. "Last week in a meeting of the deputy commissioners with the Divisional Commissioner at Rawalpindi, we were talking about afforestation and I happened to mention something about the damage to young trees that is brought about by the indiscriminate grazing of goats. Well, I was appointed a committee of one to look into the problem. With all my other duties! But who else would do it?"

As the D.C. went on, and as we later talked with the staff aides, it became apparent that before long, with the increasing scope and complexity of public administration in the district, the technical staff members are likely to become more important and authoritative, and the D.C., while remaining as the chief go-between of Government and populace, will be less directly engaged as a general administrator, but will play a more supervisory, coordinating role.

Furthermore, it seems generally assumed that the district will have government-from-the-top-downward for some time. Local self-government is represented now by scattered local boards and village panchayats, but these are stronger in prestige than in performance---even the performance of their modest concerns in managing minor public works and performing lesser judicial functions. Eyes still look to the D.C. as the keeper of the public welfare.

As in the old days, the D.C. is required to spend ten days and nights each month on tour in his district. Formerly the tour was done on horseback; now the D.C. drives a small European car. Actually, Abdul Qayam tries to get out into the country as much as possible. "I need at least 12 to 15 days in the rural areas if I am going to keep abreast of what the people are doing and thinking," he said. "And since Partition, the D.C. is sought out more. I remember when people would stand off and watch the D.C. go by. Now they seek him out and tell him their troubles. I dress like this," he said, indicating his long-tailed Pakistani shirt, voluminous white cotton trousers and sandals, "not as a foreigner."

We asked about his own impression of the prestige of the D.C.: did the D.C. carry as much weight now as he did in former times? "Yes," he replied slowly, "the D.C. is a bigger man now than he was. The Government is doing more, consequently he is doing more. And I think these development projects must properly be under the D.C. if they are

to succeed. This is the sort of thing that I mean: Not long ago, one of the I.C.A. experts from the States wanted to sponsor a soil-conservation demonstration in the district, part of the anti-erosion project. He went to a certain village to try to arrange to use some fields, but the cultivators refused to let the tractors come. He finally held the demonstration, but there was only a small group of spectators and nothing much was accomplished. I told him later that the next time he should come to me first. I will go with him and persuade the farmers that this is a good thing and they will then listen and learn."

We asked about the D.C.'s work schedule. "I sleep or I work---that's all there is time for." How could his job be made easier? "Simple. All I need is an additional D.C. to handle all the routine work. I spend half the day reading reports and signing my name to papers. And still I have to take too much of my time to do spade-work, doing drafts. Eighty per cent of my business could be handled by subordinates---if they were capable of doing so. This way, how can I ever get free for these new (development) schemes?"

There was no time for relaxation, he said. "There is literally no place for me to hide. Everybody always knows where the D.C. is at the moment."

This last comment certainly seemed to be true. As we said goodbye and drove out the yard, a small squadron of aides, officials and plain citizens was waiting on the side porch for an interview with the D.C. The administrative superintendent was among them, and he gave us a cold look.

Among those we talked to at the district headquarters was the "A.C." --the Assistant Commissioner---a carefully-combed man in his mid-twenties, and in his third year as a member of the Civil Service of Pakistan. Finishing at the University, he had sat with 700 fellow-graduates to take the examination for a state service career, and he had been one of 55 who had won places in the select corps of diplomats, civil servants, engineers and police. After an academic year in the Civil Service Academy in Lahore, he had been given minor duties in a post in East Pakistan, then sent to England for year of schooling. Now he was an apprentice to the D.C., tasting of all aspects of the D.C.'s official life. We found him holding a court session. He was seated on a rude dais in a bare cubicle. His dark grey flannel suit seemed more appropriate to one of the fashionable coffee shops of Lahore than this particular rough setting. He was wary and talked only in what seemed to be Academy terms.

We dropped in on the new Administrator of the District Board, an ex-Army major who had been appointed three days earlier. His post was temporary. He had come under orders from the provincial government to handle the affairs of the board---the administration of certain schools, roads, hospitals, ferries and parks---because the board had been superseded for overstaying its three-year term of office by 15 years. Elected in 1938, the board had lingered on, with no one to dislodge it, until now.

They were preparing the new election rolls now, said the Major, and the election would be held in February. "But I for one am against this adult suffrage," he volunteered. "We in Pakistan should have the electoral college system, as you do in the States. In the West the people understand the vote---it is a sacred thing---but here the people are sub-

jected to all sorts of pressures---tribal, caste, political, from the landlords. They have no idea what the candidates stand for." Turning to development projects, he commented in the same key, "No, we continue to run a hundred years behind the West. The civic sense is lacking here..." He seemed to want to leave it at that.

We visited also the District Inspector of Schools, a sad-eyed man of 50 who told us that he had two M.A.'s but "still" was making only Rs. 450 a month. "How can you educate your children properly on a salary like that?" he asked.

Yes, he said, there was a tremendous demand for education. "Since Partition"---this is always the preface---"parents want their children to go to primary school." There are 293 primary schools in the district now, compared to 153 before Partition, and there are 14 high schools, 42 middle schools and 12 special schools as well. "If we build 12 more schools, then we will have one school every two miles," he said. He apparently liked the sound of that and he repeated, "...one school every two miles." The enrollment was 60,000 boys. Girls? "There must be three or four thousand." Recruitment of teachers was difficult. "There is a great scarcity of talent in these hilly lands," he said. The incentives are low: the starting pay is only Rs. 50 a month plus Rs. 30 dearness allowance. And why should a bright young man stay in a dusty, dead village? The teachers are usually middle-school or at the most high-school graduates with one or two years of normal-school training.

In charge of girls' education in the district is a gracious young Inspectress of Schools, who told us, among other things, that there was a total of 17,000 girls in school in the district. (District Inspector of Schools, meet the District Inspectress of Schools!)

Our visit to the D.C.'s revenue assistant turned up a case of progress marching backwards. With the right of primogeniture unrecognized, land has gradually become divided, among poor land-owning families, into tiny, scattered, uneconomic holdings. Government land-consolidation efforts in the Punjab have been conducted for 35 years, and now a 30-man staff can, through persuasion, effect useful consolidation at the rate of three or four villages a year. But this laborious, costly work is being nullified, we found, by the newly reinstated operation of the Islamic law of inheritance which requires division of property among daughters as well as sons. The ladies are taking this right seriously and the land further subdivides, amidst family squabbles and litigation. (One Sub-Divisional Officer told us he spent 90 per cent of his time trying cases in court, "and it's always one of the three 'z's': zamin, zun and zar [land, women and gold].")

One afternoon we dropped by the home of one of Jhelum district's four "M.L.A.'s," Members of the provincial Legislative Assembly. He invited us for supper. A stocky young lawyer, he told us in his hoarse voice how he had won his seat: His father, a big land-owner, had "been given" Muslim League sanction to run for the Assembly, but he decided not to run and turned his dispensation over to his son. There was no contest.

Our host explained that in his view there were four stages in the political development of a democratic nation. "First there is the period when you bribe the voters, then you bully them, then you kiss them, then

you argue with them. At present we have a very backward state of affairs in Pakistan and you have to do these things." With this bit of political philosophy out of the way, the M.L.A. went on, non-stop, in an hour-and-a-half bombastic monologue on the ins and outs of party politics in Pakistan. My eyelids were lowered to half-mast by the time we said good night.

I couldn't help but compare the D.C. with the M.L.A. Both are the same age, both hold positions of public trust. One of them was particularly clean-cut, the other was almost sinister. One spoke of the people with affection and concern, the other with disdain. And yet the D.C. is the "representative of the Government," while the M.L.A. is the "representative of the people." The D.C. is the heir to prestige and authority and is a key administrator in a government in which the executive branch far outweighs the legislative. The M.L.A., it seems, will have to make his own place in the government and in the minds of the people.

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