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The Merit System and Integrity in the Public Service

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OVERVIEW

- What is merit?
- Exceptions to merit
- Obstacles to merit
- Strengthening the institutions
- Identifying merit: 'good practice'
- What should governments (and individuals!) do?



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Defining merit

“The best person for any
given job”



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Implications of a 'best person' definition

<i>IMPLICATION</i>	<i>CURRENT PRACTICE</i>
1. Focus on individual jobs at all levels	Focus on the point of entry
2. Appointee is best candidate	Appointee is merely able to do the job
3. Posts are open to all candidates	Posts are restricted to certain candidates
4. Systematic, transparent and challengeable	Arbitrary, secretive, unchallengeable



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Exceptions to merit

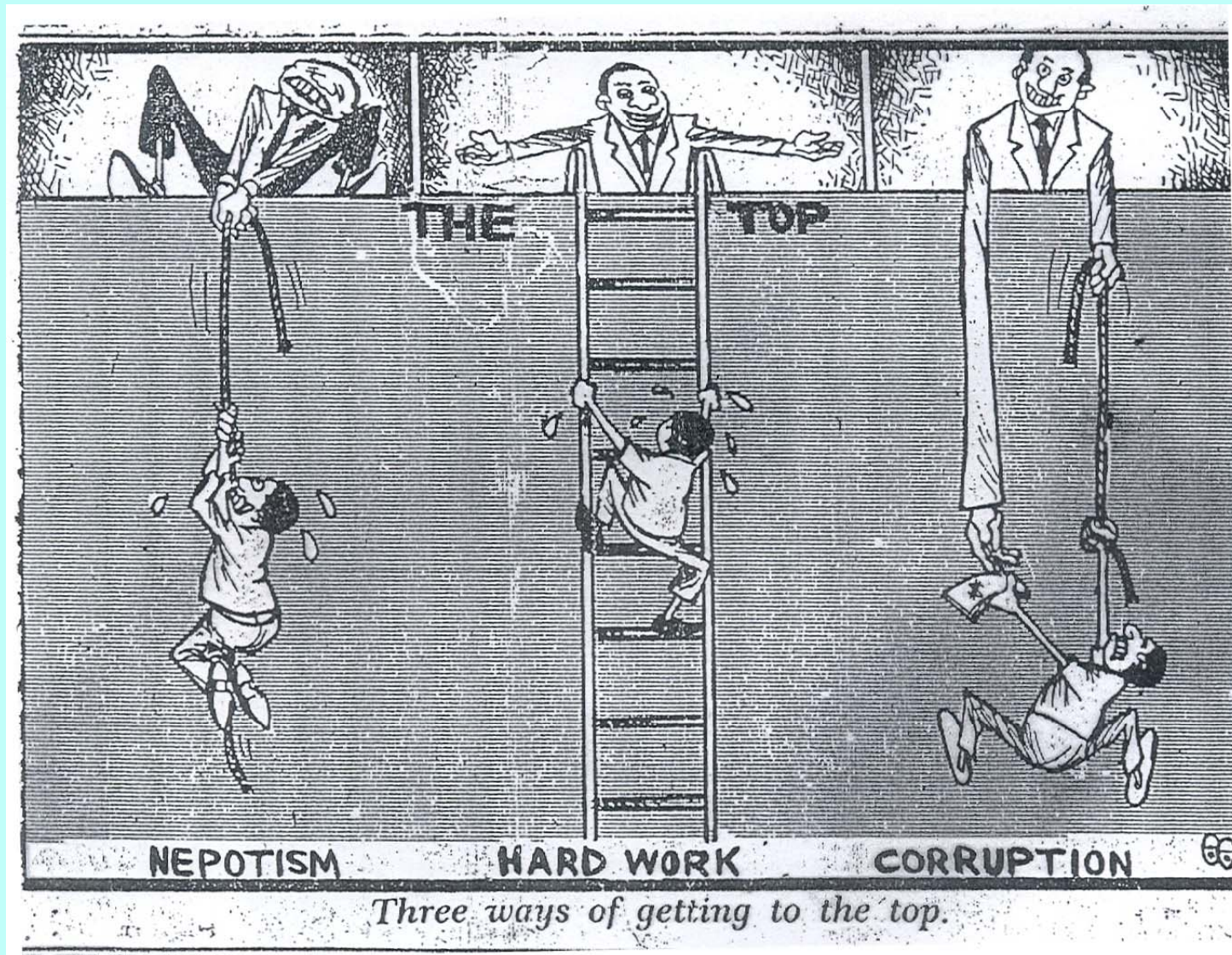
1. Elected officials
2. Political appointments
3. Affirmative action (quotas)
4. Internal appointments; transfers; local discretion
5. Other appointments: succession plans; secondments; 'acting up'; reallocation of duties



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Obstacles to merit



Source: The Herald (Zimbabwe)



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Obstacles to merit

- (corruption)
- political patronage (clientelism) and nepotism
- discrimination
- faulty definition of merit



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Institutions: Sri Lanka's PSC

- A history of political patronage: the PSC as political football
- 17th Amendment to the Constitution:
 - PSC freed from govt. control
 - Opposition has new role in commissioners' appointment
 - First Chairman robust and independent
- But political pressure remains



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Institutional arrangements

- legal provisions (e.g. anti-discrimination legislation)
- separating politics and administration
- setting up an 'elite' senior service'
- drawing up an internal code of conduct



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Identifying merit

1. job analysis
2. advertisement
3. standard application form
4. scoring scheme
5. shortlisting
6. final selection, with interview
7. appointment based on scores
8. notification of results
9. 'post-interview counselling'
10. induction



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What makes a good interview?

- Based on job analysis
- Standardised questions
- ‘Mechanical combination’ of scores
- Interviewers are trained

Source: Conway et al. (1995)



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Practice implications

RESEARCH FINDING	PRACTICE IMPLICATION
Based on job analysis	Selection criteria as basis for interview structure
Questions are standardised	Cover the same ground with all candidates
'Mechanical combination' of scores	Interviewers score <i>separately</i> on each criterion and appoint with little or no discussion
Interviewers are trained	Training courses for selectors



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What should governments do?

- Commit themselves publicly to merit
- Specify exceptions
- Recognise the forces opposing merit
- Audit existing practices to remove institutional discrimination
- Establish institutional arrangements
- Establish good practice selection methods



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SUMMARY

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- Identifying merit: 'good practice'
- What should governments (and individuals!) do?