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School For Training Third World Managers

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Bureaucracy has a role to play in the affairs of a country. This role may be positive or it may be negative, depending on the attitude of the bureaucrats. If allowed to have a control on the economy of the country bureaucratic interferences become a major hindrance to progress—as has been experienced in many a developing country where democratic institutions have remained weak. Even in a country where it works under the supervision of the elected representatives of the people the bureaucracy plays a vital role. For it is the bureaucracy that runs the day-to-day administration. Proper training of the bureaucrats is, therefore, essential. It is because of this felt need for training the Third World administrators that the World Bank runs a training school in Washington. But it is a novel kind of school. Reproduced here is a feature on the workings of this institution, Economic Development Institute, published in the International Herald Tribune.

WASHINGTON A term at one of Washington's more unusual schools has just ended.

Soulmi El Abed Alami a senior Moroccan civil servant was among the latest "fellows" in the exclusive school. It refuses to call its students students gives no examinations, identifies professors as "seminar directors" and provides each "fellow" with an efficiency apartment.

Mr. Alami never learned the words to the school songs (his languages are French and Arabic) wears no school tie (because there is none) plays no football (his game is soccer) but says he is returning to Rabat better trained in the arts of development.

This unconventional school is the World Bank's Economic Development Institute. Its alumni include Liberia's minister of health and social welfare, Sudan's state minister for energy and mining, Zimbabwe's permanent secretary in the ministry of finance and economic planning and half the cabinet of South Korea.

The courses run through the Christmas week because most of the fellows come from non-Christian countries; the 100 Third World countries that borrow money regularly from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

The Economic Development Institute is one of several Washington bodies that are barely noticed in the political dynamics of the city but are of great consequence to the outside world. Eugene R. Black a former president of the World Bank recalled an experience at Seoul's airport some years ago that illustrates the phenomenon. It was under his presidency back in 1955 that the school was started. His remembrance came in a speech in 1977.

Korean officials had sought to impress on him the importance of the institute to their country

"As I got out of the plane there was a great big banner with EDI on it and a band "Mr. Black said. "I was told that every Korean who had ever been to EDI was there. I had no idea there were so many of them. They seemed to be all over the government".

An engineer and agronomist Mr. Alami is one of the directors of huge irrigation project in northwestern Morocco. After the five-week course that ended last month he says he knows "much more about financial management" and is able to integrate it with his technical skills.

With 18 other Moroccan bureaucrats who were his fellow "fellows" he also visited Clyde's restaurant in Georgetown, the White House the Capitol and other attractions of Washington, spent weekends in the Virginia countryside He also took a side trip to New York where he met commercial bankers interested in Moroccan development including Citibank's retired chief executive Walter Wriston.

"New York City is very dynamic," observed another of the Moroccan participants Abdelaziz Chagou a senior official in the Ministry of Finance. "It's America's Casablanca. Washington is very nice but duller more like Rabat"

Mr. Alai and Mr. Chagou are among the 20,000 Third World functionaries who have passed through the portals of the institute in its nearly 30 years of operations.

Christopher R. Willoughby an Oxford-educated British economist who is director of the school says that last year it "graduated" 2,500 fellows. They took 87 courses ranging from general economic management to social forestry and primary health care. The courses which varied from two weeks to seven weeks depending on the objective were given in English Spanish, French, Arabic and Chinese.

"Expansion of countries' human capacity to manage their own development is a crucial task many would say the heart of the development problem," Mr. Willoughby stressed in explaining the school's mission of helping countries improve themselves economically.

The classes are run like graduate school seminars. "Although there are no exams we give them an awful lot of reading to do," said Guy de Lusignau the school's associate director.

The seminar directors are drawn from the World Bank itself which has a corps of well-paid specialists in just about every field of development. The institute started with three full time instructors; now there are 40.

When it first got under way, the institute encountered some hesitancy and skepticism. In fact the World Bank was so uncertain about the wisdom of the enterprise that it was willing to pay only half the costs. The other half came from grants by the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations.

"There are a lot of countries that would be much poorer than they are if we hadn't financed dams and roads and ports and power 25 years ago "Mr. Black said in 1976. "But I sometimes think that the gamble we took in establishing EDI was one of the best things we did to help our member countries over the long run."