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OUR GOVERNMENT- FOR SPOILS OR SERVICE ?

What are the roots of the spoils system?
How can our government get and keep good men in office?
Has the New Deal injured the Civil Service?

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Our Government—For Spoils or Service*?

ON JULY 2, 1881, James A. Garfield was walking through the Baltimore and Potomac railroad station in Washington. A scant four months before he had been inaugurated President of the United States. Already his administration was beset with troubles. The country was stirred by reports of scandalous mismanagement in the Post Office Department. For the new President there was barely a minute's peace from the insistent demands of office seekers who besieged his door asking for the places taken from officials of the previous administration. Suddenly, Charles Guiteau stepped up to the unguarded Garfield. His petition for a government job had been flatly rejected. From his coat he drew a pistol and fired point blank at the President. Two months later Garfield died.

The nation was stunned. Editorials cried shame! That the President of the United States should have sunk to the level of a mere job broker at the mercy of any disappointed office-seeker! Apparently forgotten was this fact: Every Chief Executive since Polk had complained bitterly that too much Presidential time, and energy were consumed in finding political jobs for loyal party workers. Abraham Lincoln had once put it, "I seem like one sitting in a palace assigning apartments to importunate applicants while the structure is on fire and likely soon to perish in ashes."

As Garfield lay dying people began to ask themselves why such a thing could have happened. Little searching was needed to find the disease which had been spreading through

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the American political system since the young Republic's third Presidential election. It was the "spoils system."

Origin of the Spoils System

The spoils system had flourished in colonial America. Robert Hunter, Royal Governor of New York, was appointed in recognition of his brave services at Blenheim. Another Royal Governor received a similar reward because someone close to the Royal ear wanted to repay a debt. The men so graciously nourished by this system promptly transplanted it to the colonies. Offices for friends were created with no duties and comfortably large salaries. One free handed governor of New Jersey, after taking care of his impoverished friends, wrote to the Crown beseeching a place for "my son Billy."

After these experiences, it was only natural that a cardinal principle of the American revolution was rotation in office with special emphasis on the officials who determine government policy. By this device the revolutionists hoped to forestall the tyranny of officials who found it so easy to make places for their friends and keep them there. As soon as the defeated Cornwallis handed over his sword at Yorktown several states hastened to write the principle of rotation in office into their constitutions. This maneuver was at best only partially successful. As each new election turned one party out of office, the incoming candidate had a plentiful supply of jobs with which to reward the faithful. Recognizing this flaw the framers of the Constitution entrusted Congress with the power to fix the terms of office for federal civil servants.

At first, all went well. Washington and his successor, John Adams, were both staunch Federalists. A change in administration was not a change in party. Therefore, there was no great demand to change the personnel. But when Jefferson's Democratic-Republicans swept into power, trouble began in

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earnest. To save as much of the government as possible from these "radicals," the defeated John Adams sat up long past his bed time signing commissions for Federalist judges. The new Democratic-Republican Congress promptly threw these judges out and put Jeffersonians in their place. President Polk wrote in his diary, "Mr. Jefferson's plan was to conciliate the North by the dispensation of his patronage, and to rely on the South to support his principles for the sake of those principles."

Blustering William Giles informed the new President: "A pretty general purgation of office has been one of the benefits expected by the friends of the new order of things. . . . It can never be unpopular to turn a vicious man out and put a virtuous one in his room. . . . Taking it for granted, therefore, that this salutary check will be applied, I take the liberty of mentioning to you a neighbor of mine as properly qualified to fill the office of marshal for this district of Virginia."

Thus it began, and thus it flourished. When "Old Rough and Ready" Andrew Jackson was campaigning for the Presidency, his party denounced the civil service as corrupt and inefficient. Jackson believed these charges. When he took office he began setting the Civil Service to rights according to his democratic lights. He believed that rotation in office should be restored. Senator Marcy's blunt announcement that "to the victor belongs the spoils" made perfect sense to him.

Jackson's policy of dismissing from government service as many as possible of the supporters of the opposing party became the model for those who followed. As one member of his ill famed "Kitchen Cabinet" put it, "You can say to all our anxious Adamsites that the Barnacles will be scraped clean off the Ship of State." Actually, Jackson turned out a comparatively small proportion of public officials in comparison with his successors.

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First Promptings to Reform

In 1864 Charles Sumner had just returned from England deeply impressed with the fairness and efficiency of the English civil service system. When he looked at the spoils politics then flourishing in his own country he was shocked into trying to do something about it. He introduced a reform bill in the Senate. But his fellow Senators were so intent on "reconstructing" the war-torn South that his bill was forgotten. The same shabby fate met a similar measure introduced in the House a year later.

But the need was great and the idea did not die. John Bigelow, Johnson's Minister to France, came back with a high regard for the French civil service system. Carl Schurz brought with him from his native land a respect and understanding of the clock-work precision of the Prussian government service. In New York City, G. W. Curtis, the militant editor of Harper's Weekly, organized the National Civil Service Reform League to put pressure on Congress to remedy the growing evil of the spoils system. At first it was all work and no glory.

Finally, in 1871 the reformers gained a precarious foothold. At the request of President Grant, Congress appropriated $25,000 to improve the Civil Service. Curtis was given a chance to turn his words into actions. He was put at the head of a commission of seven to devise some way of making government employees the servants of the people rather than of their political sponsors. Unfortunately for the battle against the spoils system, Curtis was a liberal Republican. The irate conservative members of his party saw to it in 1873 that Congress gave his commission no more money.

The reformers had to go back to writing tracts and making speeches. They were heartened by Hayes' inaugural message which promised Civil Service reform. Real success seemed

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just around the corner when Hayes appointed Schurz to the Department of the Interior, and another reformer, Dorman B. Eaton, was sent to England to study the British Civil Service. Hayes even went so far as to take a number of positions in the New York customs house out of the hands of politicians. But the expected reform did not materialize.

The reigning conservative politicians had no use for the "snivel" service reformers. Senator Conkling of New York airily dismissed them as "man milliners, the dilettanti and carpet knights of politics, men whose efforts have been expended in denouncing and ridiculing and accusing honest men. . . . They were wolves in sheep's clothing. Their real object is office and plunder. When Johnson defined patriotism as the last refuge of scoundrels he was unconscious of the undeveloped capabilities of the word 'reform'."

Not only politicians opposed Curtis, Eaton, Schurz and their companions in arms. The public was simply not interested in what they had to say. In 1880, one reform lecturer in Chicago widely advertised an address on the Civil Service and what must be done to make it an effective part of government. Eight curious people turned out to hear him.

The Pendleton Act

Then came the assassination of Garfield. At once people understood what the civil service reformers were talking about. Politicians ceased looking down their noses at the "snivel" service. President Arthur gave his active support to the Pendleton bill providing for a real Civil Service. In 1883 he attached his signature to this bill and it became a law.

The Pendleton Act made these provisions:

1. The President was instructed to appoint a commission of three, not more than two of the same party. This commission is to supervise the reformed Civil Service and draw up rules for

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entrance examinations. Today it is known as the Federal Civil Service Commission.

2. The President was given the power to designate certain federal offices to which one can be appointed only if he has received a high ranking mark in a competitive examination to test his fitness. (The merit system.)

3. The term of office of these officials is to last during the period of their good behavior.

4. Preference is to be given to war veterans.

5. District of Columbia positions in the federal civil service are to be apportioned to the citizens of the various states according to the size of their populations.

6. It is illegal to ask these employees to give money to any political party for political purposes.

By the end of Arthur's term, 16,000 positions had been set aside for the Civil Service. There remained 100,000 subject to the spoils system. Like Adams' "midnight" judges, these depended on political "pull" rather than merit to get and hold their jobs.

The triumphant Civil Service reformers were no longer on the defensive. From the time of the passage of the Pendleton Act the history of the Civil Service has ceased being a thankless battle against the tremendous odds of indifference and suspicion. Instead, it has been one of steady growth. Unfortunately, that growth has not been as rapid as the growth of the demands that modern government puts upon a Civil Service.

Today, the personnel of the United States Government must care for a highly industrialized state. This, plus the most severe economic depression in United States history, has made it necessary for the government to widen its activities. The duties of administration in this expanded state have increased a thousand fold since the Constitutional Convention sat at Annapolis and planned a centralized United States. The Civil Service which supplies the men and method of efficient government management has not had the same powerful impetus

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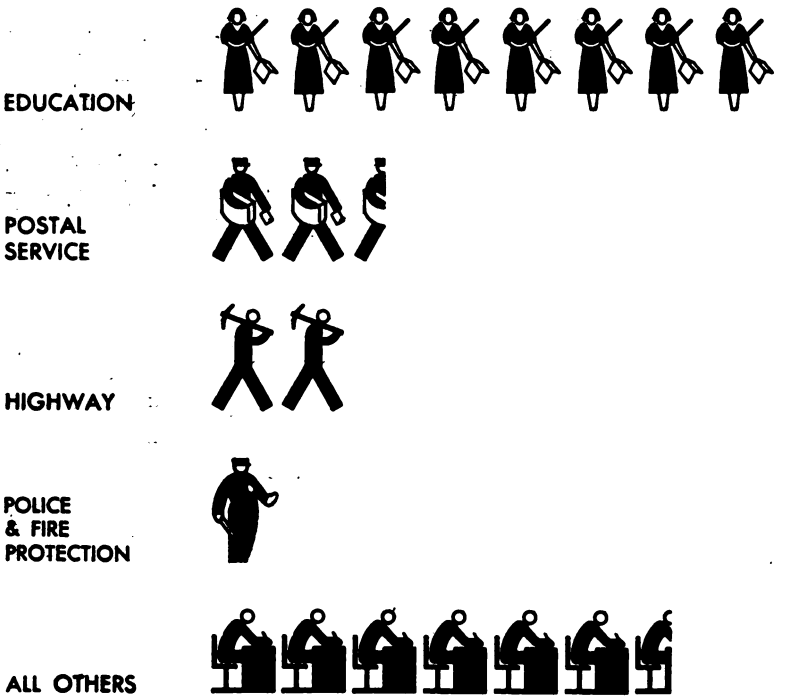
GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES



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to grow. Like curative medicine, the Civil Service has been injected into the government only to remedy well developed ills.

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What Civil Service History Has Shown

The history of the United States without a well developed Civil Service has established four important facts:

1. Neither laws providing for rotation in office, nor laws assuring tenure of office greatly improved the Civil Service or unseated the spoils system. Rotation in office merely threw open a great many government positions to political spoilsmen every time an election brought about a party turnover. Those in office naturally seized every opportunity to make a personal profit, at the expense of the government, if necessary. They well knew that at the end of their term they would probably be out of a job.

Tenure laws which were adopted to make possible orderly rotation in office merely emphasized the spoils system. These laws, such as the federal "Four Year Tenure Law" of 1820 paved the way for a wholesale turnover each time another party came into power.

2. With the growth in physical size of the American government, the President has been faced with two violently inconsistent tasks. As chief executive of the government he is responsible for its efficient management. As the head of his party he is required to bolster party power by filling as many offices as possible with loyal party members. Today the President is responsible for appointing some 200,000 men to office. Party appointments usually make inefficient government. The Civil Service law has taken much patronage out of his hands and made his task considerably easier than it was in the past. Nevertheless, that law is not sufficiently sweeping to eliminate these inconsistent duties entirely.

3. Few would defend the spoils system. Even the politicians speak against it. Elihu Root said, "The spoils system is not essential to party organization. On the contrary . . . it tends to keep out of the organization the men whose services

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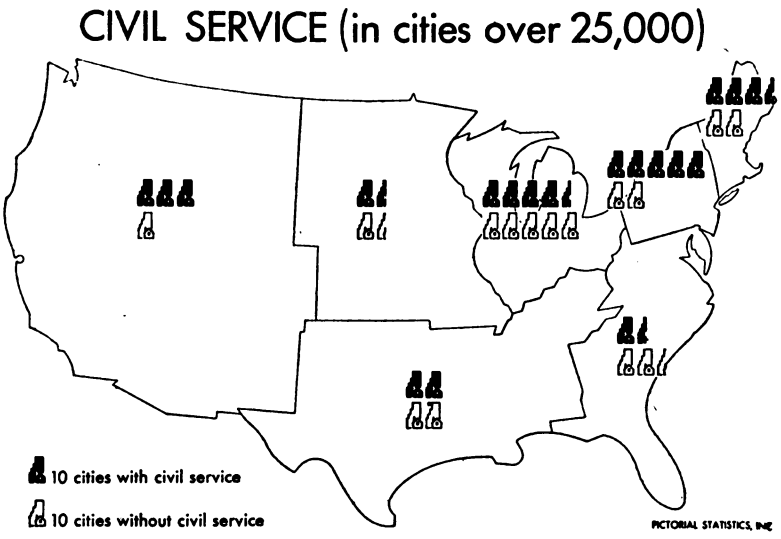
would be most effective." But no politician can afford to ignore the spoils system. He must continually be afraid that an unscrupulous opponent will use it to win a powerful position.

4. There is but one way to break the vicious circle of the spoils system. It is useless to pass individual laws to remedy individual abuses. Reform must come by setting up a Civil Service system that cannot easily be corrupted. Public servants



must be given office, permitted to hold their position, and advance without the interference of political whim.

The Civil Service Today

What is the Civil Service today? Who are the civil servants? In its broadest sense, the civil service is the sum of the positions in municipal, county, state, and federal government that carry out the work of government. They include all the non-military officials employed by the executive and admin-

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istrative branches, except elected officials and those whose duty it is to lay down the policies of government.

There are 175,478 independent units of government in the United States. This is the total for federal, state, county, and municipal government. They employed 3,278,500 people in 1932. Of this number 947,846 come under civil service acts and are members of the Civil Service in the narrow sense. These are selected by competitive examination. They hold their office and are promoted according to the provision of the Pendleton and similar Acts. In the federal government there are approximately 231,000 government servants who are not under the civil service.

In 1932 there were 653,750 non-federal government workers open to the spoils system. Between these and the workers directly under civil service laws there was a third group of 1,455,379 government employes in the federal, state, county and municipal service. Although these were not actually under the Civil Service, they were protected by various types of merit systems. This latter section is composed chiefly of school teachers.

One-tenth of the people gainfully employed are government employes. In terms of dollars and cents, they represented to the taxpayers in 1932 an expenditure of $4,520,594,000 for salaries alone. That was one-tenth of the total national income. Obviously, if the nation is to prosper and get its money's worth of service this one-tenth must be efficient and uncorrupted.

New Requirements of the Civil Service

Since the Civil War when Civil Service reform began, there have been four major changes in the social and economic life of the United States.

1. **There has been a generally rising standard of living.**

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2. There has been an increasing concentration of wealth.

3. The owners of the tools of production are no longer those who directly manage them.

4. Following the World War, industry and agriculture expanded rapidly. But the economic depression washed away the profits of industry and agriculture. Vast amounts of the public funds were spent in order to maintain the financial structure of the country and care for the unemployed.

The government itself has changed in two ways.

1. Because of the growing complexity of national affairs, government has been forced to widen its activities continually.

2. For the same reason, it has been necessary for government to take up new kinds of work, especially in the social and scientific fields.

In the midst of this changing scene, the Civil Service has also grown and been modified. The consular service was put on a civil service basis in 1906. Three years later the lower brackets of the diplomatic service were added. The Rogers Act in 1924 combined the consular and diplomatic services to form the United States Foreign Service. A Foreign Service School was created to train men for special tasks in these departments. The entire service adopted entrance examinations and the merit system.

Congress in 1923 passed a bill whereby all civil service employees in the District of Columbia were classified according to the work they did and the value of that work to the government. The purpose of this was to insure adequate and uniform pay for the work done in all departments. Previously the wage scale of clerical workers in the Civil Service had not been revised since 1854. In 1929 the federal civil service workers outside the District of Columbia were put on a similar classified list. Greatest of all developments in the Civil Service was its spread through the spoilsman's paradise, the Post Office Department. Since that department's earliest days, postmasterships were distributed as largesse to party hacks.

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The Star Route mail contract scandal in Garfield's administration was one of the causes of the Pendleton Act. But in spite of the fact that the merit system has made its greatest numerical advances in this department, the Post Office is still one of the most active foci of the spoils system.

In the state, city and county governments the development of the Civil Service has followed a slightly different pattern. There are three important trends.

1. In a survey sponsored by the Hoover Administration, Leonard D. White pointed out that local government was becoming more centralized. The large cities were taking over the functions of county government, and the states were taking over the duties of the cities. Town governments were absorbed by the counties. The federal government was absorbing an increasing number of the state's powers. The only movement in the other direction was a tendency of the largest cities to become self-governing. It is important to remember that this conclusion was reached before the present administration came into office. Today that trend of centralization has been accelerated.

2. Alongside this is the fact that in the last ten years fewer Civil Service Commissions have been created than in any previous decade since the Pendleton Act was passed. Some states like Kansas and Connecticut have abandoned the Civil Service system after having tried it. Only nine out of the forty-eight states have the merit system today.

Most of the 425 cities with a council-manager plan have some form of merit system. It is in this group that most progress has been made. Of the 355 cities with a population over 25,000, 203 have civil service laws. Thirty-five of this number have only their policemen and firemen on a merit system. This leaves 153 cities in this population group with no Civil Service regulations at all.

The lot of the 300,000 employees of the 3,053 counties

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in the United States is a very different tale. There are but four counties that have a merit system of their own. The general picture, however, is not quite all black. The county personnel is coordinated with the state civil service in New York, Ohio, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and to a certain extent, in Maryland.

3. The final important trend in Civil Service is the spreading decay of the merit system in the smaller government units. This has been brought about only with the depression. With so many friends of politicians out of work, the tendency has been to disregard Civil Service regulations. When a position is to be filled, a man aided by the right party patronage chief can frequently slip into the vacancy by the simple trick of securing a temporary appointment. This means that he does not have to take an examination, and that he is outside the regulations of the merit system. Once such a man is temporarily in office, the "temporary" clause of his appointment is overlooked and he frequently says there permanently. In San Francisco this trick has been foiled. The Civil Service Commission put through a regulation forbidding any temporary office holder to draw a salary for more than three months in any year.

PROBLEMS OF THE CIVIL SERVICE TODAY

TODAY the Civil Service is faced with the problem of meeting the expanded and changed demands of modern government. The speed with which the tasks of government expanded was determined by the quick and sensitive reaction of the voters. In their business life the people came to the conclusion that they needed some sort of banking control. The Federal Reserve System was the immediate result. That was an addition to the exterior of government. The Civil Service works inside the government. The voters do not

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directly feel a reaction to what it does. It is like an organ of the body which can be depended upon to function somehow, and consequently is forgotten unless something drastic happens to it. Because the Civil Service carries on this less obvious work, the voters have been less conscious of it and they have not insisted that it grow with the government.

In order to catch up with the demands of an expanded government the Civil Service must clear eleven hurdles.

1. The spoils system. In spite of all reform efforts it is alive and flourishing today.

2. The ingrained belief that the duties of government employees are as Jackson said, "so plain and simple that men of intelligence can readily qualify themselves for their performance."

3. The idea that public payrolls should be used to support those in need of charity.

4. The belief that patronage is the price of democratic government.

5. The impression that a good man in the public service destroys democratic government. In 1928 the President of the United States Chamber of Commerce said, "The best public servant is the worst . . . A thoroughly first rate man in public service is corrosive. He eats holes in our liberties. The better he is the longer he stays, the greater is the danger." In 1934 the Commission of Inquiry on Public Service Personnel found no evidence of this corrosion.

6. The firmly fixed idea that public servants are merely "tax-eaters", or "bureaucrats".

7. The vain hope that laws regulating tenure of office are the cure of the spoils system.

8. "Home town jobs for home town boys." This in spite of the fact that frequently the "home town boys" haven't the vaguest idea of how to do the job.

9. The baseless notion that public service is always less capable and efficient than private business.

10. The indiscriminate criticism of public officials.

11. The vainest hope of all; that abuses in the public service can be cured by specific laws against specific evils.

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The reformers of 1883 like the reformers of 1820 were victims of the last fallacy. They believed that a spoils system would be swept out once a Civil Service Commission was created. But they had made no provisions to supply that system with the proper material to carry out its work. They attacked the symptoms of the spoils system, not the cause. They did not foresee the necessity to provide and keep in the Civil Service able young men who would have ample opportunity to develop and advance with fair pay and a prospect of security. This is the career service.

A Plan for Public Service

Recognizing the defects of the earlier reform measures, the Public Service Inquiry Commission has concentrated attention on making government employment a career service.

The term career service means five things. 1. A rigid system of examinations for entrance to the Civil Service. 2. Finding the right man for the right job. 3. Careful supervision of civil servants to assure rapid promotion, a fair wage, an adequate pension system. 4. Opportunity for good men to develop, and a means of eliminating the unfit. 5. Most important of all, laws placing under strict civil service regulations all government employees outside the policy–determining and military categories. The career service is primarily designed to recruit good men to the service and keep them there.

This is a cure aimed at the root of the disease. It takes government employees out of the hands of short-sighted politicians. It insures good work by drawing good men into the service, keeping them satisfied, and unseating the drones.

The English boast that 1,500 scholars run the British Government. The difficulty with the American system is not that the United States does not have 1,500 available scholars, or that there are not 1,500 government positions that they

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might fill. There are 2,500 administrative jobs in the federal Civil Service alone. The trouble is that our present government service does not attract the proper people. If they should happen to be in it, they frequently and rightly conclude that it is impossible to do good work or advance without "pull".

To establish a career service it is first necessary to convince the general public that such a reform is necessary. Today the need for government service reform is not so obvious as it was on the day Charles Guiteau took the problem of party patronage into his own hands. None the less the real need remains.

Young workers recruited for the Civil Service immediately after completing their formal education should constitute the keystone of a career service. They would feed the higher and more rewarding positions with a constant supply of good material. At the same time, the prospect of promotion and security would bring the right men to the government service. In making it worth the while of good young men to find a career in the Civil Service, the voters would also be making efficient government.

A Career Service

Once the necessity for a career service is thoroughly realized, there are certain definite steps which can be taken to build up an efficient personnel. The first of these is naturally the definition by law of the types of the career services. These fall into five general groups. The administrative service comes first. It is the purpose of this service to put into effect the policies laid down by the elected representatives of the people. It must also carry out the various functions of government that go on regardless of party changes. Briefly, the duties of the administrators are to carry out the wishes of the people as handed down by their elected representatives. At the same time they must provide a smooth running govern-

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ment. They are like the staff officers of ship: responsible for the condition of the ship and for carrying out the captain's orders.

The obvious objection to a highly organized administrative department of government is that it might easily become a bureaucracy. In this sense, a bureaucracy is a government in which the administrators take over the task of directing the policy of the government. To prevent this a short ballot is necessary. The federal government already has a short ballot. The voters choose the President and their representatives in Congress. The President appoints his department heads who work out the various policies of their divisions and who are responsible to him. Beneath these are the administrators who put these policies into effect. These administrators must never assume the power of the elected representatives of the people who reflect the will of the people. It is their sole duty to carry out orders efficiently and consistently with previous policies. Theirs is the task of maintaining government for the people.

The difficulty with the long ballot now used in many states and municipalities is that the people elect not only the policy chiefs, but also many of the administrators. By this method it takes most of the administrator's term to figure out how to run his department well. The city manager plan of government avoids most of this difficulty.

The second division under a career service would be the professional and technical workers. Their tasks would be to carry out the specific scientific needs of government. In this field would fall such departments as public health, soil erosion service, weights and measures.

Clerical workers would be a third group, skilled workers a fourth, and unskilled the fifth.

To insure a smooth running Civil Service it would then be necessary to install personnel bureaus. One of these bureaus

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should supervise the entire federal service. Others should be created for each major department or agency. This division would see to it that the right people had the right job. They would arrange transfers from one of the five divisions to another when it was advisable. Most important would be their task of weeding out the inefficient workers and seeing to it that good workers were promoted.

Certainly everything depends on the quality of the men taken into the Civil Service. For that reason the methods and standards of entrance are of the utmost importance. First of all, the whole system would collapse if any appointments were made without previous examination. No matter how good the plans may be, you cannot build a good house without good materials. In order to get the best men, administrators should be examined immediately after finishing their general education. The examination should be aimed at finding out what sort of people they are, rather than what they may know. Special training should be given after selection.

Technical and scientific men should have their examination after their special training, but before their practical experience. This would give the Civil Service access to the cream of the men turned out by the technical schools. Their examinations should be based on their special subject and not their general information as at present. A certificate from an accredited scientific body would aid in selecting the best men. In this field also special training would be provided after the men were in the service. The Department of Agriculture already has such a school for its employees.

Examinations in the other divisions would necessarily be in the clerical skilled and unskilled fields. In many cases it would be impossible to use written forms. Obviously a plumber cannot show his fitness by his knowledge of the foreign policy of Millard Fillmore. Today this sort of information is sometimes expected of him.

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Such a system assumes that the Civil Service Commissions will have sufficient money to give frequent and comprehensive examinations. But as important as the examination is the period of probation. At present most civil service laws require at least a three months' trial. Since there are so few people to take care of personnel work in the present organization, once a person is appointed he is likely to be forgotten. The probationary period should be rigidly watched, not only to eliminate the unfit, but to check up on whether a man is in a department best fitted to his abilities.

Keeping the Good Men

Once good men are brought into the Civil Service, the next problem is to keep them there. Here is the crux of a "career" service. If the top positions are constantly filled by older men brought in from outside the service, the younger men below him will rightly feel that their chances for promotion are slim. If everyone starts at the bottom there is ample opportunity for training. A good man will take such training seriously, for there will be positions for him at the top.

Another means of maintaining the proper pressure from the bottom of a government personnel service is a system of examinations, efficiency ratings, reports on individuals and their work. By such devices the personnel division can discover who their best workers are, and where they will best fit. It is by these means that the State Department directs promotion in the Foreign Service.

For the civil servant whose interests or abilities may have changed, it is important that it should be made easy for him to transfer from one division to another. In certain cases it could even be arranged for him to shift back and forth to private enterprises. This would give the Civil Service all the flexibility that could be found in any private field.

Transfers would be particularly valuable in small civil

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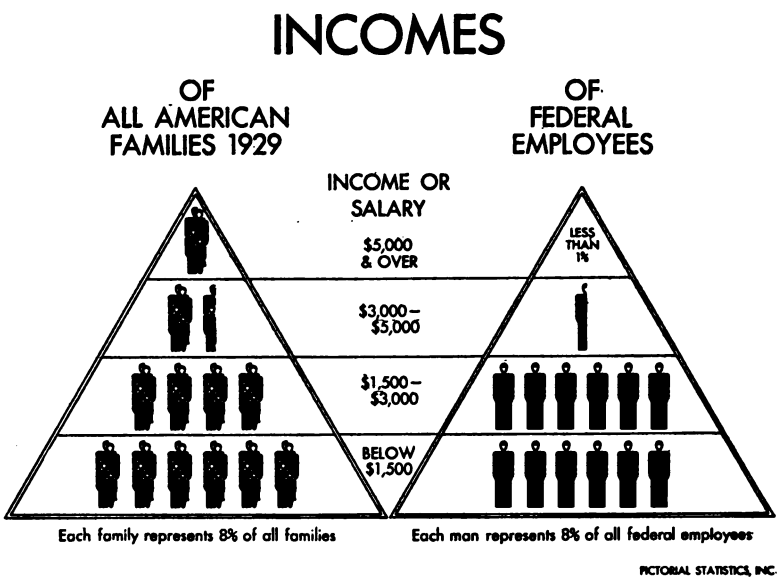

service units. Many of them in small communities are so restricted that there is no incentive for a good man to attempt to find a career there. On the other hand, if a young person could enter such a small unit with the assurance that he could be transferred to a larger unit as soon as his abilities should warrant it, there would be no need for him to hold back. Again, the various tasks of several small units might well be combined so as to make a big job. Obviously, this would be as valuable to the service as it would to the man.

The best way to get good workers into anything is to offer them a decent wage. In days when the government is striving to economize, this is a tender point. The present Civil Service pay rates are low. Less than five percent of the federal employees get $3,000 a year or more. On the other hand, forty-eight per cent get less than $1,500 a year. In the states the pay envelope is even slimmer. Forty per cent of New Jersey's civil servants got less than $1,000 in 1932. Ninety-five

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per cent of Ohio's received less than $3,000. The figures have not changed much since then.

To insure good work, and good government, Civil Service pay should be equal to the amount and quality of the work done. A salary increase should accompany each promotion. Comparable services in different divisions should receive equal pay. When career service requires the same work as private business, the amount of money received and the advancement should be at a similar rate.

Security in the Civil Service

After a person is given a living wage, the next thing he naturally wants is an assurance of security when he is no longer able to work. For that reason, civil servants are entitled to a fair pension. This again would be an incentive for good men to enter the field. But the pensions would have to be adequate, and in most cases larger than the sums now set aside for such purposes.

A fair pension system would have another effect. It would allow the service to retire employees when they are no longer capable of carrying the burden of their work. Definite age limits should be set for various positions. Thus the dead wood would be cut out of the service, young men moved up more rapidly, and the government taken out of the business of charity. Too often people are given places in the Civil Service because they need the money, not because they are capable of doing the assigned tasks. The result is poorly executed and badly distributed work. These people should be safeguarded from want. But it is certainly not the purpose of government service to provide charity.

The misapplied idea of charity also lurks behind the veteran preference laws. Without denying that war veterans have earned the gratitude of the government, it is obvious that such a debt should not be met by dumping them willy

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nilly into the government service. Under the present regulations a disabled veteran may get 60 on a Civil Service examination. Seventy is passing. Because he is disabled ten per cent is added to his mark. (Able-bodied veterans get but five per cent.) And because he is disabled, a passing grade eked out by this addition automatically puts him at the head of the list from which he will be appointed to the Civil Service before more capable people who may have received a brilliant ninety-five. In 1934 there were 179,000 veterans in the federal Civil Service. Fourteen thousand of these were disabled. Eighty-five per cent of all Civil Service employees in the country work in government units where entrance is controlled by such veteran laws.

As a further safeguard against incompetent civil servants it is essential that provisions be made to discharge useless workers and demote others. Under the present regulations it is almost impossible to get rid of an employee of the Civil Service. The Commission of Inquiry on Public Service Personnel found that in some cases an attempt to fire an employee amounted to a trial of the department and the ranking officials. At the same time, precautions must be made that will make it impossible to dismiss a civil servant because of his race, creed, beliefs, or any other detail consistent with the liberty of an American citizen.

The Right to Organize

One of the criticisms of the Civil Service has been that the government has frowned on any organization of the workers. The right to unionize was but grudgingly given, and then with the provision that civil servants should not strike. In order that they, like other workers, may protect their interests, it is but just that civil servants be permitted to have some sort of organization. In England, for example, there are highly efficient employee councils that help them out of the

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inevitable difficulties that arise between employer and employees.

Above all, it is essential that civil servants accept the decisions made by the people through the ballot, and their elected representatives. They must never become the policy determining part of the government. Theirs is the duty of seeing that the workings of the government are well directed, efficient, and consistent with the necessity of the government to exist continuously. In carrying out that task, the Civil Service is one of the staunchest bulwarks of democratic government.

A Plan for a Career Service

Briefly, the steps in establishing and keeping a real career service alive in government are these:

1. By law classify the various Civil Service divisions of government into five general groups: (a) Administrative, (b) Technical and scientific, (c) Clerical, (d) Skilled and trades, (e) Unskilled.

2. Insure the quality of men accepted by adopting keen examinations and eliminating temporary appointments. The Civil Service should be geared to the educational system.

3. Establish a large personnel division to coordinate the various parts of the Civil Service and guarantee efficient treatment of the workers.

4. Attract good men to the service by: (a) offering them a chance for promotion; (b) giving them ample opportunity to develop; (c) paying a living wage; (d) awarding fair pensions.

5. Keep the service in trim condition by: (a) rigid retirement laws; (b) eradication of the idea of the Civil Service as a government charity; (c) proper provisions for discharge and demotion.

6. Strengthen the *esprit de corps* by permitting civil service workers to organize freely.

7. Add vitality to democratic government by a sharp distinction between policy deciding officials and administrators.

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Immediate Action

The next question is what to do immediately to improve government personnel until such a plan can be put into effect. Large scale changes would take at least two years, and many valuable reforms could be made within that time.

The first step is the immediate repeal of the laws modeled after the federal "Four Year Law" of 1820. These measures were designed to prevent jobholders from staying too long in office. Nor is there any reason for not including under the federal Civil Service merit system the many professional and skilled workers in the regular government departments who are subject to the spoils system.

At the present time the federal government is giving state and local governments large sums for public works and other emergency measures. This offers an opportunity to spread the Civil Service in these areas. A condition of such grants could be that wherever practicable the people hired on such projects should meet the standards of employment set up by the United States Civil Service Commission.

It would not be difficult to arrange for the care of war veterans in some way other than by weighing the Civil Service with them. With the present large expenditures for relief, the veteran preference laws could easily be eliminated.

In 1932 the federal government made certain drastic cuts for the sake of economy. Section 213 of the Economy Act specified for example that only one member of any married couple could remain in the service of the federal government. About eighty per cent of the employees affected by this ruling were earning less than $2,000 a year. The small economy accomplished by the spreading of work was more than offset by the hardship it brought to many loyal public servants. This section of the 1932 Economy Act should be repealed.

Ever since the Pendleton Act, federal civil service regu-

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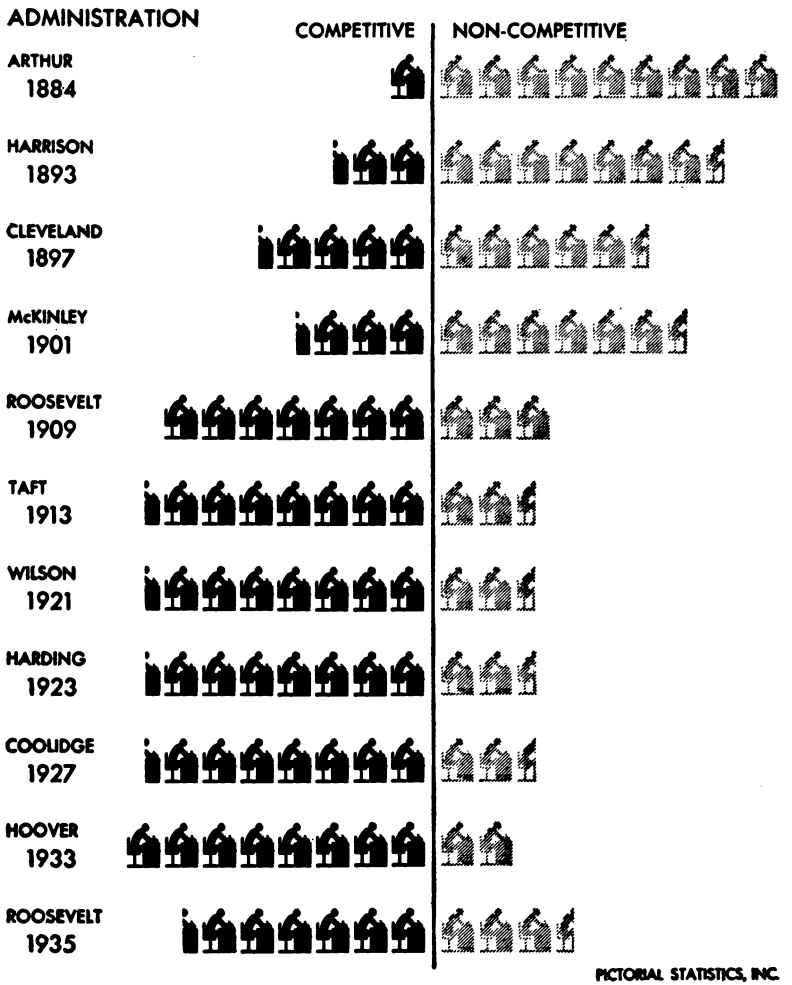
THE FEDERAL CIVIL SERVICE



Each symbol represents 10% of all employees

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lations have required that federal employees in the District of Columbia be apportioned among the states according to the population of those states. New York, by this provision, has the same percentage of federal employees in Washington as sparsely settled Nevada. Ability does not always follow geographical lines. Under most circumstances the present regulation does no great harm. But at times it keeps outstanding men out of the government Service. This section of the Pendleton Act should be eliminated. In order to insure proper employee relations, every government service unit regardless of whether it is federal, state or local should have the supervision of a personnel officer. In small units one such officer could do for a group of offices.

To establish a career service, money is needed for personnel administration and the Civil Service Commission in order that a real merit system may be maintained.

IMMEDIATE PROBLEMS

THE two greatest Civil Service problems today are (1) personnel management in the emergency agencies set up under the New Deal, and (2) the spoils system among Post Office employees.

From 1883 until the present administration the proportion of federal employees under the Civil Service has grown steadily. As we will note in the chart on page 25, however, it has taken a sharp drop in the past four years.

The existing Civil Service personnel has not been cut. Instead, since March, 1933, 251,000 government employees have been added to the federal payroll. The controlling fact is that 230,000 of these, mostly in the emergency agencies, are beyond Civil Service laws. This is what reduces the percentage of merit system employees in the federal government. Various statutes and executive orders, all part of the New

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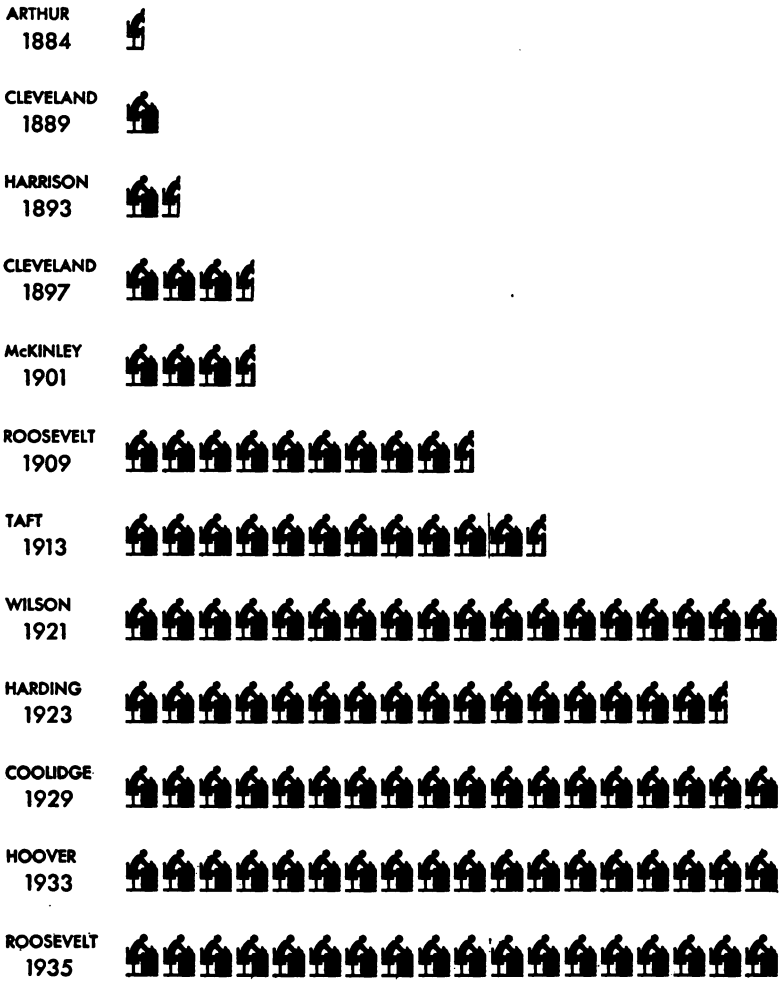
COMPETITIVE EMPLOYEES IN FEDERAL CIVIL SERVICE



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Each symbol represents 25,000 employees

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Deal program, have created 177,000 of these unclassified positions.

With a bank panic on one side, and growing unemployment on the other, it was of the utmost importance for the New Deal to get under way with all possible speed. To have insisted in the beginning that all employees in emergency agencies be supplied by the Civil Service would have hamstrung Mr. Roosevelt's projects from the start. Indeed, the Civil Service Commission was not equipped for such a large order. Speed was essential.

The fact that many of these departments were considered temporary also prevented their being taken under the civil service wing. Laws like the Pendleton Act really apply only to permanent agencies. The President promised, however, that as soon as and whenever possible the emergency agencies would be put under the Civil Service. Early in the course of the New Deal, Senator Logan of Kentucky introduced a bill in the Senate to accomplish this.

Obviously, the existence of so large a group of government employees outside civil service regulations disrupts the merit system. It is true that some agencies like the Tennessee Valley Authority have established workable merit systems of their own. But in many of the new emergency divisions the spoils system is flourishing. Civil service authorities are now urging that the whole group of emergency employees be put on the merit system as soon as possible. Unfortunately, in an election year those who have the power to accomplish such reform are reluctant to run the chance of cutting off so large a group of supporters.

More difficult is the problem of the Post Office. Since the time of Benjamin Franklin that department has been the spoilsman's supply base. It has become the custom for a successful presidential candidate to appoint his campaign manager Postmaster General. He, of all officials of a party, bears the

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brunt of keeping party workers satisfied. The postmastership is the coin he uses to pay party debts.

Since 1883 practically every President has cut into the Postmaster General's patronage pie by taking an increasing number of postmasterships into the Civil Service. There still remain approximately 13,000 first, second, and third class postmasterships as nourishment for the spoils system. Logically enough, these are the 13,000 most valuable positions in the department. According to law, the Postmaster General recommends men to fill these positions to the President. The President in turn passes them along to the Senate where they are finally acted upon. The names are originally submitted to the Postmaster General by the Civil Service Commission. The Postmaster General may, and frequently does reject all of these Civil Service recommendations. In their stead he may send to the President a list composed of advantageous political appointees. Under an executive order in 1933 the President has disqualified all present postmasters from taking an examination for positions in this profitable group.

At the same time that order was given, Senator O'Mahoney of Wyoming drew up a bill to put the unprotected 13,000 under strict Civil Service regulations. It was introduced in the Senate at the request of the President. But like the Logan Bill, this measure has been ignored.

With the oncoming Presidential election the charges of spoils politics in the Post Office are beginning to fly fast and furiously. For the opponents of the administration the cases of Mr. Goldman, the present New York City postmaster, and the postmistress of Cody, Nebraska, have each become a *cause celebre*. Mr. Goldman, a non-civil service man is supposed to have displaced a postmaster of long and honorable record. The postmastership of New York City is the richest position in the Department. Cody, Nebraska, is a mere village of 600 inhabitants. But that has not taken the sting out of

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opposition Senators' accusations. In this case it is charged that a woman was made postmistress in spite of her failure to pass the Civil Service examination, although this is one of the postmasterships strictly regulated by Civil Service laws.

With ammunition of this sort available, it is apparent that patronage in the Post Office Department when properly handled is as good a weapon for the opposition as the spoils system is for those in office. Therefore, with no "practical" political reason for keeping this last vestige of pre-reform days in the Post Office Department, there is little excuse to ignore the Mahoney Bill.

The Need for Public Action

Any change in government is difficult to accomplish. It has been obvious for years that a career service would be a great aid to better government in the United States. The fundamental obstacle which, in the last analysis, stands in the way of all reform is public inertia. The League of Woman Voters and the National Civil Service Reform League have been trying to remove that obstacle in the case of the Civil Service. Opponents of democracy point to this same inertia as one of the basic reasons for the failure of democracy to provide wholly efficient government. The founding of the Civil Service fits perfectly into their somewhat cynical equation. They argue that the death of President Garfield alone made possible the Pendleton Act.

This argument falls down before the fact that the Civil Service has continued to grow since the passage of the Pendleton Act. And without the impetus of assassination or a major scandal. Civil service reform was necessary to the continued efficiency of democratic government. It is a part of the trend toward more formal government, centralization, and a democracy aiming steadily at constitutional liberty rather than freedom.

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That was true in 1883. It is true today. But reform does not automatically produce itself. It lives on public support. It becomes a fact when that support is crystallized into action.

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