

OVERSEAS TRAVEL

It is common knowledge—it has sometimes been a topic of unkindly comment—that many officers of the Public Service go abroad to attend conferences and for other official purposes. We, of course, agree that such travel should properly be—and it is—subject to scrutiny to ensure that there is value for the cost in time and money; but we appreciate that the value cannot be measured precisely, and there are indirect advantages of distinct value to the administration of the Public Service. Ours is an isolated country; and all of us, public servants not the least, need to be on guard against insularity. From time to time proposals are made for the interchange of officers between Government services of different countries, or for periods of secondment to other Administrations. We are also anxious, as expressed elsewhere in this report, to encourage studies by public servants, with leave of absence if necessary, even at the cost of present inconvenience. These purposes are well served by our officers taking part in conferences concerned with problems similar to those they deal with at home, and by their contact with their “opposite numbers” in other civil services.

During the past year, with the quickened pace in international affairs, conferences have been concerned with United Nations problems; conditions of travel by air and sea; health; scientific affairs; forestry; marketing and supplies; and, on a regional basis, South Pacific problems.

We were glad that towards the end of 1947 Mr. W. E. Dunk, Chairman of the Australian Commonwealth Public Service Board, was able to visit New Zealand. Many public servants had the advantage of discussing with him administrative problems of common interest. In 1948 our Commission was invited to take part in a conference, in Canberra, of Federal and State Public Service Commissions. Mr. Bolt and Mr. J. K. Hunn attended for New Zealand; through the courtesy of Australian colleagues they were able to learn much of interest and value.

RIGHTS OF APPEAL

At present officers of the Public Service have an unrestricted right of appeal against all promotions, provided (a) the appellant would gain promotion if appointed to the position in dispute, and (b) he was an applicant for the position if advertised. In the Post and Telegraph Department this right of appeal applies only to appointments carrying a maximum salary of £1,025 or less, and in the Railway Department to appointments with a maximum salary of £765 or under. No such limitation is imposed under legislation relating to the Public Service.

Legislation on the rights of appeal was not reviewed in 1946, when the control of the Public Service was changed from a sole Commissioner to a Commission of three. One member of the Commission is the nominee of the New Zealand Public Service Association. It is felt that the various provisions of the Act now merit review, and in particular the provisions relating to appeals.

Appointments to senior positions are not made hurriedly or without full inquiries on the merits of the officers under review. The Commission acts with the fullest and best advice it can obtain; usually it has applications reviewed, and at least a short list of possible appointees interviewed personally by a selection committee. On occasions the Commission feels that Departments, and administration generally, would benefit by appointments which the Commission hesitates to make because it must realize that it would be difficult to satisfy the Board of Appeal that the proposed appointee is at the moment of making the appointment “the most suitable and efficient officer available for the appointment.” Long experience in the work of the Department in which the vacancy arises may be given more weight than general administrative ability; in other words, the scales are heavily and perhaps unduly weighed in favour of an officer already in the Department. The Commission frequently desires to take a longer view for the ultimate benefit of a Department, and the Service; and the legislation as at present gives an undue bias towards “efficiency and suitability” at the time the appointment is made.