

This cardinal principle of open competition and promotion by merit has long been recognized as the only satisfactory basis of working, and it is now embodied in the laws of the Dominion under the provisions of the Public Service Amendment Act, 1927, which requires the Commissioner in making appointments to give preference to the most fitted and efficient officer.

REGRAIDING.

The last regrading took place in 1924, and another general regrading is now engaging attention.

In addition to the initial grading undertaken when the Act first came into operation there is statutory provision for a five-yearly regrading, the purpose of which is not only to bring the Service as far as possible into line with conditions and rates of pay prevailing outside the Service, but also to ensure that any officers who are found to be out of relation in the matter of salary and responsibility may be graded on a common basis with the rest of the Service.

A duties classification must be based essentially on the systematic grading of all officers within certain definite divisions according to the nature of the duties performed. The Public Service Act provides for a grading of officers in five principal divisions—viz., Administrative, Professional, Clerical, General, and Educational—and the grading of all officers within these divisions is required to be based on the fitness of the officer and the character and importance of the work performed by him.

The procedure adopted in connection with the 1924 regrading has to a great extent been followed this year. Visits of inspection have been made to the various district offices throughout the Dominion for the purpose of affording officers desiring it an opportunity of make personal representations to the Commissioners respecting their duties and grading. Prior arrangements had also been made for a more intensive investigation into the work of each officer by an Inspector from this office, while in addition towards the end of last year a comprehensive report on each officer was obtained from their respective Heads.

In the actual process of regarding, an attempt is made to ensure that officers are placed in such a grade or class as will provide each a salary relatively commensurate with the responsibilities and the duties performed.

There exists in some quarters the impression that each five-yearly regrading means a general raising of salary standards. This is entirely wrong. Such a practice would have most undesirable consequences, besides being quite unjustified. It should be apparent that with a systematic classification scheme which has been in vogue for a decade and a half there should be comparatively few officers whose salaries require material adjustment, particularly when it is borne in mind that a relatively large number of regratings take place in the intervals between the five-yearly reviews. A general alteration of standards would be justified only in the event of some violent fluctuation in the cost of living causing a pronounced alteration in wage standards outside the Public Service.

It is not proposed to suggest an alteration in the existing salary scales in connection with the present regrading.

EFFICIENCY OF THE SERVICE.

The periodical surveys of the Service in connection with the regrading afford an excellent opportunity of gauging the general efficiency of the Service. The true test of efficiency is the promptitude, accuracy, and economy with which the public are served. The standard set to-day, when tests and comparisons can be made by means of balance-sheets and cost accounts on commercial lines, is much higher than it was before the advent of the Commissioner system and the introduction of more modern methods. Although, on account of the fundamental differences in policy between a State undertaking and private business, the relative efficiency cannot be judged entirely on a profit-and-loss basis, it can be claimed that the standard of intelligence of the staffs and the efficiency of the methods employed in the Public Service compares very favourably with outside standards.