

During the past few years covering the period of economic depression there have been fewer staff changes than in normal years. When times are good there is a considerable wastage of staff due to officers obtaining more attractive positions outside the Public Service. Largely due to this fact, and also to the policy of reducing staffs wherever practicable, the number of new appointments has fallen off considerably.

The fundamental principles underlying the Public Service Act are—

- (a) The elimination of influence ;
- (b) The affording of equal opportunities for advancement, and providing for promotion not by seniority, but by merit and fitness ;
- (c) The institution of a classification scheme ; and
- (d) The promotion of efficient and economical administration.

In regard to (a)—the elimination of influence—the Royal Commission which was set up in 1912, and upon whose report the Public Service Act was largely based, stated that one of the first duties of the new form of control should be to block all “back doors” of entrance to the Public Service. The Commission considered that the characteristics of the Service should be—

- (1) Entry by competitive examination ;
- (2) Probation before final admission ;
- (3) Security of tenure during good behaviour after admission ;
- (4) Promotion by merit ; and
- (5) Pensions on retirement.

The wisdom of this recommendation is exemplified in the efficiency of the Service to-day. In contrast to the well-ordered scheme of control of the New Zealand Public Service is the state of affairs in Newfoundland as found by the Newfoundland Royal Commission in 1933. The Commission in its report stated :—

“The Civil Service of Newfoundland exists only in name. In place of an organized Service recruited by examination or otherwise under established regulations there is a collection of individuals who for the most part owe their positions to political influence. There is no cohesion and no *esprit de corps*. Little regard is paid to the qualifications of candidates for particular posts. . . . The spoils system is in force, and it has been the practice for the party returned to power at a general election to find places in Government employment not merely for their political supporters, but also for their friends and relations.

“In addition, the Civil Service is handicapped by the arrangement under which appointments are distributed as evenly as possible among the various denominations ; in an individual Department, members of one religion or another are often by tradition the predominant factor in it, and, in the case of new appointments, efficiency is liable to be sacrificed in order that a person of a certain denomination may be appointed.

“The influence of these considerations has been such that good work has been placed at a discount. Impartial administration is difficult ; and even where men may have endeavoured to do their best for the country in spite of the obstacles confronting them, they have too often found their recommendations set aside or ignored on account of political or denominational considerations. Persistence in a course of action likely to arouse the opposition of those who have friends at Court would at best be foolhardy and at worst suicidal.

“In the result, apart from very few individual exceptions, the Civil servant is apt to be subservient to the politicians, is afraid of assuming responsibility for fear of offending them, has a tenure of office which is liable to be uncertain, and is generally lacking in efficiency.

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“The last point we wish to make is that the defects to which we have referred make the average Civil servant little qualified to play a part in the control of expenditure. In a normal Civil Service it is to be expected that the officials in a given Department will check and prune very carefully any proposals for expenditure which it may have to meet before submitting them to the Treasury. This is not done in Newfoundland. Moreover, the Departments are apt to make exaggerated cases, whether at the instance of a politician or otherwise, for increases in salary, special allowances or special pensions, for the benefit of favoured individuals. The Controller of the Treasury can rarely rely on the proper co-operation of Departments in checking and curtailing expenditure ; and it is necessary for him to assume a greater responsibility in supervising the detailed work of the Departments in this respect than should normally be required.”

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The most obvious conclusion to be drawn from this report is the grave danger which any country runs when its administration is mainly carried out by Ministers without assistance from a highly-trained and authoritative Civil Service.