

Civil Servants and Trades Unions.

In a recent issue *The Civilian* printed a news item relative to the actions of certain branches of the Postal service in the United States in affiliating themselves with the labour movement. The action in question has roused the ire of the *New York Tribune*, which deals with the case in the following interesting statement of general principles:

"An issue which has of late been the chief troubler of France now threatens to be raised here. Since the settlement of the Dreyfus case, nothing, with the possible exception of the conflict between Church and State, has caused so much disturbance and loss in France and been so great a menace to the integrity and perpetuity of the republic itself as the question of the affiliation of the civil and military servants of the state with the Federation of Labour. It has caused two colossal strikes which paralyzed industry, gravely hampered governmental administration and caused immense losses, suffering and even many deaths. To deal with it some of the most stringent government action in the history of the republic was taken, but the end is not yet.

"Now, the 'unionizing' of mail clerks in this country and the affiliation of them with the American Federation of Labour, in defiance of orders issued by the Post Office department, must be considered as a direct step towards creating the same conditions here. We do not, of course, suppose that it is being done with the same purpose. In France the avowed object was to throttle and paralyze the government. We are quite willing to credit the American Federation of Labour with a degree of patriotism which would not for a moment countenance any such scheme, and with a sincere, if sometimes misled, desire simply to better the conditions of labour and life among its members. But it should be obvious that, with the best

of intentions, it would be difficult for the arrangement which is now being attempted to avoid serious clashes with governmental authority and interference with governmental work.

"The employees of the government must be subject to the laws and rules of the government and to no other. Practices which may be permissible in other employment cannot be permitted there. Thus, for mail clerks to refuse to put mails into certain sacks because they were not 'union made,' to work on certain railroad trains because the brakemen were non-unionists, or to engage in a universal sympathetic strike because of a disagreement between some shoe manufacturer and his operatives, would be intolerable. Yet precisely such things are done by trade unions in respect to private employment, and the affiliation and standardizing of the public service with private employment would logically mean the extension of those practices to the civil service, exactly as has actually been done in France.

"There is the less conceivable pretext for an organization of public employees because of the prevalence of the merit system in the civil service. That system now gives the employees of the federal government an assured tenure of employment, it provides for their promotion according to fitness and ability, and it protects them from unjust discrimination and oppression. In brief, it secures for them the most important of the legitimate aims of trade unionism, and it does so far more effectively than the unions themselves could do. It is certainly not too much to expect that in return for that governmental protection the members of the civil service will give their first loyalty to the government and not to any extra-governmental and potentially anti-governmental organization."