



# The CIVILIAN



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## The Commission and a Great Reform

### Promotions to the Higher Positions

A representative of the *Civilian* in search of knowledge directed his footsteps to the Hunter Building, the grey walls of which inartistic edifice enclose the offices of the Commission that functions so largely in Civil Service affairs. The Commission is much in the public eye today. Has it succeeded or is it succeeding?

The magnitude of the task of public administration in the federal arena of a country the size of Canada can scarcely be mirrored even by those who may themselves be most prominently placed in the centre of the stage. Therefore it is the purpose of the present writing to draw attention to but one related feature of the great task in which the Commission—criticisms and attacks to the contrary notwithstanding—may justly lay claim to the achievement of a great success in connection with its recent policy regarding promotions.

There is still fresh in the Civil Service mind, the system under which the term "Patronage" has become suggestive of a hydra-headed octopus. Under this system, strangers and outsiders, in search of the unearned increment, were given places in the national workshop over the heads of those who had spent years in acquiring a knowledge of the methods of conducting public business. This most notorious system found its most despotic and shameful exemplification in the Customs Department where the thing was actually given a name, to wit, the Preventive Service. It did "prevent." It prevented for many, many years in the Customs Department the operation of Justice in one of its most simple forms.

The new promotion policy of the Commission has abolished the "preventive" system absolutely, and barring the human error, common to all mundane affairs, actually provides an all round method to deal with the difficult problem of filling vacancies by promotion from within the Branch, the Department or the Service as a whole.

When a vacancy occurs in a Department and a requisition is received by the Commission asking that it be filled, the first question that is put is "Can it be filled by promotion?" and unless most good and sufficient reasons can be advanced why it should not, and the Commission is satisfied that it is in the best interests of the Service that it should not be so filled, Promotional Competition is insisted upon. The Department may recommend that the competition be confined to a certain Branch, to a certain District, or to a certain class of employees, and, as a rule, the recommendation is approved. In some cases, the Commission may rule that the competition shall be open to a certain class of employees in the Civil Service, but it is only in the last resort that a position is thrown open to public competition.

Publicity is insisted upon: that is posters describing the position vacant and calling for applications from those qualified are exhibited prominently in the Department, the District or Branch to which the competition is to be confined. Thus every employee is given a chance to compete. If it is in the interests of the Service that a written examination should be held, that is provided. If not, promotion is made on an Efficiency report, based on the

seniority, efficiency and fitness for promotion of the candidates. These matters are also taken into consideration even when a written examination is held.

As stated, the three factors on which a promotional competition is decided are (1) Seniority, (2) Efficiency, (3) Fitness for Promotion. Of these, Seniority is given the least weight. That is to say, length of service will not out-weigh evident superiority in Efficiency and Fitness; while at the same time, other things being equal, or even slightly against the senior applicant, length of service will have sufficient weight to turn the scale in his favour. This is as it should be. The top heavy value attached to Seniority in the past that worked undoubted hardship upon able juniors and proved detrimental to the Civil Service (as indeed in other Governmental Services), can no longer be allowed predominance.

The rating of an applicant must as far as possible eliminate personal prejudice, or should it be called the variation of the human equation, that occurs when even the most conscientious of men is asked to give his written opinion and recommendation concerning a number of persons with whom he has been in more or less personal relations. This is the object of the "numerical" or "percentage" system, whereby the Efficiency of an applicant can be expressed in arithmetical terms capable of mathematical weighting and comparison.

With this in view it became necessary to define "Efficiency," that is, to decide of what component parts it is comprised, on what specific factors the "Efficient" em-