

# THE CIVILIAN

DEVOTED TO THE INTERESTS OF THE CIVIL SERVICE OF CANADA

## Resignations from the United States Civil Service

In the United States, as in Canada, voluntary resignations in the civil service have become extraordinarily numerous in recent years, so much so that the United States Department of Labor has given the matter detailed consideration. The December issue of the *Monthly Labor Review* (published by the U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics) contains a special article of 14 pages giving the results of its investigation.

The figures compiled by the Civil Service Commission covering the whole permanent and temporary service show that the total number of voluntary resignations increased from 3.7 per cent. in 1903 to 17.5 per cent. in 1917; that is, that resignations increased from 1 in every 27 employees to 1 in every 6.

In an effort to bring this information more up to date the Commission on Reclassification sent out a questionnaire to the Government departments, asking data as to resignations from their forces for each fiscal year, beginning with 1915-16. In order that the data received might be worked out on a uniform basis, officials were asked to calculate their average number of employees "by first deducting all temporary or special-job employees, and then dividing the sum of the numbers on the monthly pay rolls by 12. In giving the number of separations they were asked to exclude the field force, the temporary employees, and those who had been dropped on account of a reduction of force. The data received, therefore, relate to the permanent force of the Government, not including the fringe of temporary employees, special-job employees, and war workers, among whom separations would naturally be the most numerous."

The information received in response to this questionnaire is given in a table from which the following is taken:

Year	Average number of employees*	Resignations	
		Numberx	Per cent of force
1915-16	31,063	3,121	10.0
1916-17	32,570	5,346	16.4
1917-18	42,433	15,460	36.4
1918-19	61,570	24,938	40.5

\* Exclusive of temporary employees.

x Exclusive of temporary employees and those leaving the service on account of a reduction in force.

These figures show a remarkable increase in voluntary resignations from the Government service during the past five years. During the years 1917-19, of course, a proportion of the resignations were due to the conscription law, but, as the report points out, this proportion was not great, especially during 1918-19, when conscription was operative for only four months, and "there is every reason to suppose that apart from military demand, there was a marked increase in separations from the Government service in that year." This statement is confirmed by the figures for the first half of 1919-20, which show "that employees were leaving the service... at a rate which if continued throughout the year would mean the departure of one in every three. What such a rate of resignations means both to the efficiency of the Government service and the cost of administration can easily be imagined."

A study of the classes of employees who are leaving shows an even more serious loss than would be involved by their mere number. A loss of efficiency occurs whenever a worker familiar with the studies of a certain position leaves and his place is taken by a newcomer who must gain that

familiarity. Obviously this loss is the more serious as the duties of the position are the more complex, or involve co-operation with others, or include carrying out plans and making observations extended over a long period. It is relatively a simple matter to replace a worker in the lower grades, but a different affair to fill the place of one of a body of statisticians, economists, or scientists who are working together on nation-wide plans. Yet among such men and women, the report states, "the scientific and technical employees of the government, the rate of separation is particularly large." The position of the U. S. Bureau of Standards is especially noteworthy in this respect. In 1918-19, in every class of employees, the scientific and technical, the clerical, and the skilled and unskilled labor groups, the number leaving was greater than the average total staff employed. In 1919-20 matters improved slightly, but the rate of separations was still 100 per cent. for the whole bureau and 103 per cent. for the scientific workers. What such rates mean in breaking up the continuity of the work, in time spent in training new employees, and in interference with the smooth coordination of the various parts of the work any employer can judge. Figures collected in December, 1919, show that in one group of clerical workers in this bureau, numbering 116, only 12 had a record of five years or more of service, while 20 others had been with the group over two years, their period of service ranging from 23 months down to a few days.

### CAUSE FOR LEAVING GOVERNMENT SERVICE

Why are government employees leaving the service in such numbers? It is a matter of dollars and cents. In the industrial world wages and salaries have risen much more noticeably than in the civil service, and the diffi-