

Patronage and Efficiency in Civil and Municipal Service

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During these times of struggle, economy and production, the question comes forcibly home to all of us, are we getting the best service from those who are administering the people's affairs in the municipal, provincial and federal governments? One hears a great deal, especially at election time, about incompetent servants, inefficient service, graft, fraud, etc. Nor is it to be wondered at that such is the case if we think of the present system of public service. All the mistakes, graft and fault of administration should not be attributed to the government leader and his associates. Some of these mistakes may be due to those officials who are not elected by the people, but appointed by the ministers and who may prepare the work for the minister in charge of that department of the government.

This problem of civil service is not of minor importance as it is estimated for 1911 that in Canada there are in civil and municipal governments, 76,604 workers. This estimate is probably much lower than the number of public servants which really exist at the present time.

At the risk of being irksome one might mention some disadvantages of the present civil service:

I.—The majority of municipal and government appointments have been made through the personal influence of some individual in power for the sake of friendship or for political reasons and in many instances, very little consideration is given to the appointee's qualifications for the position.

II.—The method of the appointment of the civil servant is wrong and with a bad beginning it is difficult for him to improve as he proceeds with his duties. There is little encouragement offered to the public servant to do his duty well in hope of his obtaining some promotion, because only too frequently, so soon as the power or influence behind him is removed, his term of office expires or he may be tolerated in his present office without the slightest opportunity of getting ahead. The result is, especially in government work, every temptation is placed in his way to make the most of his position for personal ends, and he is expected to make hay while the sun shines.

III.—Again, if the official is cunning, he may contrive to advertise his merits, push himself before the eyes of the public and impress those with whom he comes in contact with his ability. The result is, such men are frequently placed in responsible public offices for which they are entirely unsuited. It may be the position should be held by some quiet studious retiring person working in a back office or laboratory.

IV.—Competent servants are sometimes unfairly discharged. In seven or eight years a good municipal official may be compelled to resign or receive his discharge because, through the faithful performance of his duties, he has created so many enemies who are thirsting for vengeance and constantly striving to dislodge him from office. Such enemies are as a rule political workers and as a result acquire much influence with those elected and who, for the time being, have the authority. These officials, if promoted to another office, would render valuable service.

V.—Under present conditions, resignations of officials take place daily with little or no investigation regarding the reasons for such actions. It costs money to educate and acquaint each official in his new position. A city or government have no right to bear this loss continuously. Why this waste of efficient service without reasonable action to correct conditions?

VI.—Public servants whose efficiency and activities are impaired by old age, are either retained in their office to the detriment of the office or dismissed. In the important executive positions at least, it is a pity to lose practical knowledge acquired during a whole lifetime of service. Such persons might be retained with advantage to the government or municipality in an advisory and honorary capacity with a suitable salary instead of being discharged with or even without a pension.

VIII.—Men of the best ability will not take a government position at present, because the salaries are too small, because they lose their independence and must take instructions from persons who are not qualified to give instructions and because there is a stigma of almost disgrace attached to some of these positions by some people.

Uncertainty, fear and secrecy among the employees of a department, poison and paralyze the usefulness of the mem-

bers of that department. "Putting the 'fear of God' into their hearts as has been said will never accomplish the same good results as if the public servant was inspired to put forward the best in him by quiet confidence and conscientious effort and an intense desire for promotion. Hope of promotion, ambition, desire to better his condition and that of those about him, by rendering better service are healthy normal symptoms and will bear the best fruit.

A suggestion might therefore be made and that is, that promotion for public servants as far as possible should be made from municipal offices, in each department, to provincial and from provincial to federal. Some of the departments in which such promotions might be carried out are, legal or attorney general, police and detection, public health, public highways and roads, department of municipal affairs, finance, etc.

The plans and work of municipal officials are constantly exposed to public criticism—more so probably than those of government officials. Those who stand up against this storm are worthy of promotion. They have acquired practical knowledge in handling men and affairs that should make them valuable servants in their special branch of work in the provincial government. If they have received a good education and training in their department of work from college before entering upon their municipal duties, so much the better, and such a system of promotion as mentioned will attract the best men into municipal service. The essential qualifications for promotion, however, should be a good clean character and the ability to obtain the best results in their line of work for their municipality.

A non-political commission for the province composed of honest, independent and capable men who have closely studied and filed the biography or record of each successful municipal servant should make the appointments and promotions—especially should this apply to the more important government offices. If necessary this commission should travel to the various municipalities to study directly for themselves the method of work and acquire a personal knowledge of the official. Then the best men from all over the province would occupy the important positions in our government.

It has been said that the chief or commissioner of a department should be permitted freedom in the choosing of his assistants and staff, and especially in the choice of those persons in whom a certain amount of executive ability is required. With a certain amount of adjustment and co-operation, this difficulty could be overcome. The head of a department might assist the civil service commission in choosing, by emphasising before the commission, the qualifications, standard of education and experience which are required in a man to successfully fill the position. The civil service commission should have no difficulty in securing a suitable person, specially qualified by previous experience in the required department of work and promote him from the municipal service. The final decision however should remain with the commission, in order that there should be no favoritism or other unfairness in making the appointment.

So too, a dominion commission or department could study the records of those provincial servants who had proven themselves to be men of exceptional ability in their special department of work. Even the present civil service examination for the minor government offices might be abolished. They have the same fault that those examinations in schools and colleges have. A student may have a good memory and acquit himself credibly at the examination and afterwards fail miserably in practice because he lacked more essential qualifications which the examination would not expose. Such a civil service commission could draw together the best men with the widest experience in their special department of work from each province throughout Canada for the benefit of the Dominion as a whole.

As a result of this opportunity for promotion, a type of public servant is produced who becomes a true expert by exerting himself as much as possible in his department of work to attain his ambition. He should be given a reasonable opportunity to improve himself in his work by attending official meetings, visiting other cities and neighboring countries. At present the chiefs of government de-