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THE CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

The federal civil service in Canada is made up of the large body of permanent and temporary employees of the government. It embraces federal government personnel not only in Ottawa but also throughout the whole of Canada.

With the exception of cabinet ministers who head government departments, persons on the staff of these departments are in the civil service. While departmental heads may change with an election, the staff in those departments remains unchanged. This staff has the experience, training and specific knowledge necessary to advise the minister and carry on the work of the department. Thus the responsibility for the government's business actually rests with this permanent body of civil servants, and continuity is provided to the Canadian form of democratic government. The selection of such a body is of primary importance to good government.

The employment and placement agency of the Canadian government is the Civil Service Commission. Its development can be roughly traced through the recurring attempts to remove government positions from the political sphere. Until 1908 patronage was the principle on which appointments were made to the public service. While in 1882 a Board of Civil Service Examiners was set up to examine candidates and issue certificates of qualification, the government of the day continued to make the actual appointments. As the service expanded and the need arose for continually more government employees, some uniform method of recruiting for the public service was sought.

A commission in 1907 reported in favor of the setting up of a two-man commission appointed by the governor-in-council. The civil service was reclassified, and a competitive merit basis was established for all members except deputy heads, technical and professional personnel and some in the lowest branches of the service. Promotion was by recommendation of the head and deputy head of the department, with or without examination. The entire service was placed on a higher educational basis, but the merit system was by no means firmly established. With the expansion that took place during World War I, new regulations were necessary.

In 1918 the Civil Service Commission as it is known today was established by the Civil Service Act. A third commissioner was added, and the principle of appointment after open competition and promotion by merit was laid down for all positions in the service, whether in Ottawa or in other parts of Canada. A complete reclassification of all positions and the establishment of new rates of compensation were among the first duties of the new commission.

ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMISSION

The Civil Service Commission is composed of three commissioners who are appointed by the governor-in-council for 10 years on good behavior, with a compulsory retirement age of 65. They have the rank of deputy ministers and may be removed only by the Governor-General on joint address of the Senate and House of Commons. The commissioners therefore enjoy the same independence as judges, for they are not officers of the government in power or responsible in any way to the party holding office. Length of tenure of office provides continuity to their work and also aids the development of close co-operation between the ministers and commissioners. Regardless of party affiliations prior to appointment, the commissioners are required to be strictly non-partisan.