

# THE CIVILIAN

DEVOTED TO THE INTERESTS OF THE CIVIL SERVICE OF CANADA

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## The New Civil Service

*The significance of the following article by Professor Wrong is the interest aroused outside the Service in the problem of good government. Professor Wrong is interested in a movement to establish a Civil Service Reform League in Canada.*

IT is a law of nature that when a reform is made, its defects are, at first, more obvious than its advantages. Every reform involves change and every change involves alteration of a system that worked in some sort of way and to which its servants had grown accustomed. It is not easy to do a thing in one way to-day and to change to-morrow and to do it in a way quite different. All this is written to account for a possible disappointment with the recent changes from the patronage system. Some members of Parliament are perplexed as to appointments in their constituencies. Who should know better than they the eligible people? Others think that an examination is a poor test of fitness for the duties of the public service. Choose a person, they say, for his qualities as a whole and not for mere book knowledge. Ministers chafe because they cannot get quickly the men they want, and office-seekers with every claim but merit, fume and rage before a closed door. It is all according to nature and it shows that the new system is getting well under way.

From it we must not expect too much but we have the right to expect a good deal. Directly and indirectly it will affect the whole public life of the country. Directly, by improving the calibre of those in the public service. Every man in the service knows how sick at heart he has often been at seeing merit count for little and influence with the politicians count for much. What a dark future had a hard working official in the Post Office at Toronto or Montreal when the road to the highest office was rigorously closed to him and was open only to some one who, whatever his qualifications as a politician, would at best know nothing of the workings of the Post Office. The politicians have been really shocked to see the Postmastership at Toronto go

to a man who has earned the highest place by actual service in the Post Office. They do not see where they come in. They are weary of life because such things can happen. Meanwhile in the heart of the efficient public servant a new encouragement has found place. Merit is to be recognized. He may by ability and zeal gain the highest posts. In Montreal and Toronto and Winnipeg and Vancouver he may rank as an equal with the leaders in banking, in the professions and in commerce and fear nothing but the failure to do his duty.

This spirit the new system will arouse in the good man now in both the outside and the inside services. (There is, by the way, no reason why they should be rigorously separated, no reason why a good official at Ottawa should not be made Postmaster or Collector of Customs at Montreal or Toronto.) We shall find as the new system matures its results that when inefficient men drop out they will be replaced by others who must have established at least some claim to efficiency. We shall find something else. Since the politician cannot get offices for his nominees he will lose the incentive to crowd the public service with persons who are not needed. There will be fewer people in some of the public offices. No doubt some of them are undermanned and need more, not fewer, persons really useful. But some of them are manned with people who only cumber the earth and when they drop out there will be no motive working to replace them. Not only will this help the public revenues. It will clear the way for requiring that every public servant shall have work which ought to and must be done and that he does it. The civil service will be like a great bank or railway. No one will be there who does not perform or has not

performed some work of real benefit to the public.

In one other direction I am thinking of the profit of the great reform. Canada is not peculiar in having its politics bedevilled by the active zeal of men who want only something for themselves. In every country there is a class whose patriotism is limited by the measure of what they think their country can do for their own pockets. This kind of person delighted in the old patronage system. The more selfish of them rejoiced in what they secured directly by way of contracts for themselves or others and in offices in the public service. Self-important people, though seeking no personal gain, were eager for the influence which came to them because they could command favors from the government. It was people of this type who were most active in many constituencies. And now their occupation is gone and there is an aching void. No wonder some are sore at the change. We have to face the growth of an alternative. If the new system works effectively the petty politician will be able to promise no rewards to himself or to his friends. There will be nothing for him in helping to elect this or that person to Parliament. Because he is selfish his interest in politics will wane as he finds steadily that "there is nothing in it." For a while he will try to prove that, in spite of civil service reform, there is still something in it. If the Civil Service Commission holds fast and really uses its powers, he will soon grow weary of ill doing. Then he will drop out of politics and the great problem conflicts us, who will take his place?

Here at last is found the supreme test of the possible working of the great reform. Who will take his place? Who will do the hard work of organizing the political party, looking after the voters, easing misunder-