

Promotions by Merit—The Murray Report—A Court of Appeal Needed.

That portion of Sir George Murray's report which deals with the difficult problem of promotions cannot be read with satisfaction by civil servants. It is certainly in violent contrast with the constructive tone which characterizes many of the other findings. It begins by the sententious remark that the Head and Deputy Head of a Department alone can judge of the work of their employees and should therefore have the sole say in promotions. This of course presupposes, as Sir George is at once led to remark, that the Head and Deputy Head be entirely removed from undue influences. That they are not invariably so Sir George at first dismisses with a wave of the hand—he is not supposed to deal with matters like that. Going into it a little deeper, however, he does seem to have discovered that the opposite is at least possible and that there have occurred a case or two where other merits than those of the good work of an employee have led to his promotion. Nevertheless, and in spite of this, Sir George returns in his concluding remarks to the opinion that no outside check on promotions is desirable, preferring to base his judgment on an assumption which he admits is unfounded, to facing the problem as it stands. Where there are two horns to a dilemma, Sir George believes that if you successfully impale yourself on both, the dilemma may be left to take care of itself.

The Civilian has no wish to belaud the present system, which is one that has bred much irritation without compensating advantages. No more does it desire to hint that Heads and Deputy Heads are habitually unjust and unsympathetic towards their staffs. It does affirm, however, that promotions no less than appointments should be safeguarded in every way possible, and that to leave them unprotected, as Sir George Murray proposes, is to invite very serious dangers. Who does not know that in the large Departments, promotions half the time are the result of "pull" and "pull" only? And, knowing that, who shall say we ought to let the matter rest there? Of the two evils, appointment by "pull" and promotions by "pull," the latter is the more demoralizing.

We do not ourselves claim to know any plan that will be found entirely satisfactory. We are, however, attracted by the New Zealand scheme as outlined in our last issue, which virtually offers two independent tribunals to settle questions concerning the personnel of the service. As at present constituted we venture to suggest the following for discussion and comment: Let the Head and Deputy Head become again the sole arbiters of promotions, as in the good old days. But let there be created a court of appeal to which any civil servant who feels himself passed over in a specific promotion may carry his case. It is for just such a tribunal that the British service is at the moment putting up its strongest fight. The personnel of the court is a detail. But the performance of some such function might easily be added to the duties of the Civil Service Commission who are more in touch with the service as a whole than any other body. The commission would then cease to give the merely desultory or perfunctory O.K. to promotions that goes at present (with exceptions that are arbitrary and therefore particularly calculated to create friction and bad feeling) but would be required to look into such cases as are duly and with a prescribed amount of evidence brought to their attention by aggrieved employees. This would leave to the Heads and Deputy Heads a free hand in the great majority of cases, but would make them amenable, as they should be, where a civil servant can demonstrate, on grounds consistent not merely with his own but with the public interest in efficient administration, that he has been unfairly dealt with.