

An Interesting Situation.

Some of the Problems the U. S. Civil Service is at Work on.

Conditions in the civil service of the United States offer at the present time a most interesting field of observation from the Canadian point of view—and especially from the point of view of the Canadian civil servant. Our Washington friends have had the benefit of the merit system of appointment—at least to the lower grades—much longer than we, viz., from 1883. Up to the present, however, they have been without any advance in scale on account of the increased cost of living, and they are, moreover, without retirement or superannuation provisions of any sort. To obtain recognition of these two great claims a somewhat radical plan of organization has been suggested, several having advocated affiliation with the organized labour movement. Of the entire problem presented in this tripartite form—increased salaries, superannuation, and trade-unionism in the service—the *Evening Post* of New York in a recent issue had the following review:

“Although the clerical force at Washington has long passed the stage in which it could infest the lobbies of Congress, or crowd the galleries of either chamber to shout insults at an unpopular orator, it is still threatened with a peril from within itself. Professional agitators who are urging the clerks to ‘organize,’ and force terms from their employer by methods which the labor unions have made familiar, profess to have received much encouragement. It will be a sorry day for the civil service of the United States if their advice is ever heeded. There is little danger, of course, of a strike of Government clerks accompanied by violence; for that would mean, in effect, taking up arms against the Government. But even a peaceably disposed organization maintained for the purpose of bringing about, by pressure, a selfish end, however just

in the abstract, would be interpreted by the mass of the people as a class enterprise, and revive the talk of an ‘office-holding caste,’ which used to frighten timid statesmen out of doing anything for the reform of the civil service.

“The warnings of spoilsmen against establishing a permanent class within the Government, having interests apart from those of ordinary citizens, did much to delay the enactment of the civil service law of 1883 and retard its intelligent administration for some years afterward. Its acceptance was grudgingly yielded on the faith of the assurance of friends of the reform that nothing of the sort would follow. Any deliberate action by its beneficiaries tending to falsify these pledges will mark the beginning of the disintegration of the merit system.

“As intimated in the article under comment, the advance of the movement for an increase of the general pay-roll may cause a brief subsidence of the project for pensioning superannuated clerks. This plan will disappear for all time if the active clerical force is organized on trade-union lines. Such a change would furnish the opponents of the pension scheme with a ready-made argument. ‘Support your disabled and poor from your union fund,’ they will say; ‘if we are to treat with an organization at the point of the sword, we do not propose to supply it with additional means for carrying on its contest by relieving it of one of its proper burdens.’ In short, the best hope the clerks have of procuring their desired increase lies in standing on their records for individual efficiency and faithfulness, and making their appeal to the plain sense of justice, not to the fears, of Congress and their fellow-citizens.”