

Address of  
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President of the  
National Civil Service Reform League  
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## Fitting Talent to Task and Making the Service Fit.

Now is the opportunity of the League; now is its obligation. Never before has there been such a demand for scientific employment and management in service both public and private. This year it has been shown that the people favor our reform. In Colorado and Baltimore, against the opposition of both party machines, the voters carried the merit system by almost 2 to 1 in the former case and almost 3 to 1 in the latter.

Government civil employment has grown vastly in recent years and it has grown not only in bulk but it has been entrusted with many new undertakings. With this growth in size and variety of enterprises is the demand that not only shall the overburdened taxpayer be saved from waste and extravagance but that in all the undertakings which so closely touch our business, our property, and our lives we shall be saved from the mistakes and failures of incompetent officials.

Waste and extravagance there have been and mistakes of officials not trained in their tasks have injured, for example, the credit of public utility corporations so that neither the investor is protected nor the public served. Such waste and injury have caused unrest and a distrust of government supervision and management.

### War Showed Need of Experts

The Great War has had its lessons. It has shown the need of trained and expert men and the value of capable specialists.

For the army and navy it was not enough that only able-bodied and sound-minded men should be enlisted, but after enlistment they had to be kept well and strong and to be drilled and disciplined.

So for the civil service. The enlarged program of the League plans not only for guarding the entrance and securing good subordinates but also after entrance to make and keep the service fit.

In the army and navy, as never before in the United States at war, has it been recognized that it is not enough to have able privates, but that the officers should be carefully selected and thoroughly trained. So in the civil service. It is the present policy of the League to extend the merit system to all higher officials not charged with the responsibility of settling public policies. We must have able management and brains to direct and control as well as good subordinates.

These policies of the League, namely, the securing of efficiency after appointment and good management through capable superiors, are extensions of the original purpose of abolishing the spoils system. Close contact with and long observation of the public service have shown the absolute need of such innovations.

This League is the only organization disinterestedly concerned with the civil service. By common consent it is the watchman on the walls and if it sees an enemy, though a new one, and blows not the trumpet and the people be not warned, then will their blood be required of its hands. We must take up new arms to attack new foes, if we are to be faithful to our trust. As James Russell Lowell says in his "Present Crisis":

"New occasions teach new duties: Time makes  
ancient good uncouth;  
They must upward still, and onward, who would  
keep abreast of Truth;  
Lo, before us gleam her camp-fires! we our-  
selves must Pilgrims be,  
Launch our Mayflower, and steer boldly through  
the desperate winter sea,  
Nor attempt the Future's portal with the Past's  
blood-rusted key."

The National Civil Service Reform League has now attained the age of thirty-eight. At this stage of its manhood it is well to review its purposes and policies, old and new.

### **First Purpose Was to Destroy Spoils System**

The fitting of the talent to the task was originated as the way of ridding us of the spoils system. It was con-

ducted by competitive, written examinations of an intellectual character, varied, according to the tasks, all the way from the task of a doorkeeper to that of the calculator of the nautical almanac. Though mainly intellectual, "experience sheets" often counted in the marking and practical tests were added to the written examinations for many positions, such as bench tests for skilled mechanics, physical competition for police and firemen and dictation at varying rates for stenographers and typists.

Competition of such a character was evidently limited to filling routine or subordinate positions. It could not test executive or organizing ability for important directing positions, nor would high-grade professional and scientific men submit to such a competition.

The original object of fitting talent to task was to abolish patronage, to free us from the autocratic power of the political machine, and to purify politics. Yet increased efficiency was not wholly lost sight of in the propaganda of George William Curtis, Dorman B. Eaton, and Carl Schurz. But increased efficiency was rather a by-product than a leading motive. Increase in efficiency was predicted for the system and that prediction was fulfilled. For example, official reports showed that in the first thirteen years under the civil service law, in the departments at Washington three per cent. less persons did considerably more work than before; while in those same years in bureaus excepted from the merit system the number employed increased more than one third and the cost was almost doubled, without any corresponding increase of output.

### **Merit System Saves \$30,000,000 a Year**

An Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, the Hon. Charles S. Hamlin, compared the efficiency of the bureaus within the civil service rules with those outside, and using also an official report of William Windham, who was Secretary of the Treasury both before and after the civil service law, calculated that \$10,000,000 a year was saved as a result of the merit system. Since then the federal employees under the

civil service law have increased three-fold in number. On this basis it may fairly be said that about thirty millions of dollars a year are now saved through the increased efficiency of the merit system, in the Federal civil service alone.

The Hon. Carroll D. Wright, that eminent statistician who completed the United States census of 1890, calculated that its exemption from the civil service law had cost the Government \$3,000,000. This was no rough guess, but was based on a careful and detailed standardization and scientific measurements of work under and outside the merit system.

In the railway mail service, where accurate statistics are kept, it was proved that more work was done per capita and with five times the accuracy after some few years of the application of the merit system, and the director under whom this application took place officially stated that he could not have achieved this great improvement excepting through the freedom from political appointments which the merit system enabled him to maintain. The amount of money saved was almost incredible.

The Wisconsin game warden's department showed a deficit of \$7,000 the last year under spoils. Under "merit" it produced a net profit of over \$125,000 from licenses and fines.

### **Does the Merit System Destroy Discipline?**

Constant complaint is nowadays heard that the security of tenure of the civil service laws begets dullness, sloth, routine and bureaucratic habits.

But what about the spoils system? The security of tenure, as long as the party that made the appointments was in power, was even greater than it is or ever has been under the civil service system, and a party often remained in power in a city, state, or nation for decades at a time. During these long reigns it was impossible to get rid of henchmen of party magnates. Let us take a few examples: The late Silas D. Burt, head of a large branch of the United States custom house in New York when under the patronage system,

discharged one such henchman for repeated intoxication. He refused, at the risk of losing his own office, to reinstate him, but the senator of that great state induced the Secretary of the Treasury to reappoint over Colonel Burt's head this worthless man. What became of the discipline of the office I leave you to imagine.

In a Washington bureau the head of it complained that he was forced to keep a number of drunkards on his payrolls to satisfy the congressmen on whose favor the appropriations for his department depended and that he set apart a room in which those men slept off their intoxication, but try as he would, he could not get rid of them.

In the historical instance of the 525 supernumeraries in the Bureau of Printing and Engraving in Washington, for whom, in order to keep them out of the way of the regular workers, bunks were provided, in which they spent the larger part of their time in sleep, Mr. Graves, the head of that bureau, struggled in vain to get rid of these useless persons through his nominal power of discharge. In the end Mr. Graves managed to call public attention to the abuse, secured a senatorial investigation, and finally that bureau was put under the merit system, and the abuse ceased.

No, whatever may be said by the careless critic, it is easier to remove the incompetent, the intemperate, and the insubordinate under the civil service law than under the spoils system.

Let me give you one more instance—that of a certain municipal sealer of weights and measures. The excuse that the sealer gave for his almost total lack of prosecutions and small number of investigations was that his deputies secured their positions by political methods and held them upon a political tenure. Though he nominally had the power, he was not permitted either to choose or discharge them and so could not enforce discipline. This was done not in the dark ages of American history nor in the land of the James Brothers outlaws but in the year 1907 of this 20th century in the City of Boston, Massachusetts.

## Civil Service Machinery as Yet Imperfect

It may well be asked:—if the merit system is such an improvement over the spoils system why has it failed of adoption in more than three quarters of the states of the Union? The answer seems to be:—while far superior to the spoils system, yet in comparison to the best privately managed business, as we must frankly admit, government civil service even under the merit system is relatively inefficient.

To have our civil service motor adopted, it is not enough that it be superior to some antiquated one-cylinder machines still largely used in the backward communities. It must be up to the best models that can be had.

Now, the League in its advance program advocates modern principles of scientific private business management, and we believe they may be successfully adopted for the government business not only because we think so *a priori* but because in actual experiment, on a sufficient scale and long enough time, we have proved that they can be.

## Merit System Must Include Higher Offices

The most noteworthy addition to the original program of the League is that of applying the merit system to higher directing officials and injecting into the whole of the public service scientific business managers and efficiency experts under the control of civil service commissions.

As to the first of these it may be objected, as we have already admitted, that written, intellectual competition is not suited for determining the needed executive and organizing ability for high administrative positions and that leading professional men will not submit to such an examination. That difficulty is overcome by substituting for the written competition of candidates, assembled together at stated times and places, a competition of careers. At the risk of being charged with repetition, let me explain this too little understood form of competition. It is conducted by means of technically developed questionnaires ad-



dressed to the candidates as to their past education, training and achievements in life. These are filled out at their homes or offices, sworn to, and sent back to the civil service commission. Sometimes an essay is required to go with this on the subject of the best management of the office to be filled. The replies to these questionnaires are then checked up through independent inquiry by the civil service commission and information obtained as to the character, ability, and reputation from those who know or have employed these candidates.

All this information is then submitted to a small examining board selected by the civil service commission from among eminent persons of the appropriate profession or calling. This board grades the candidates and from among the highest three the selection is made.

### **Fill \$10,000 Positions by Competition**

This competition of careers was invented by the United States Civil Service Commission some eighteen years ago for the selection of the supervising architect for all the Federal buildings. Since then it has been applied to between one and two thousand different positions in state, nation, and municipal service. The civil service commissions using this method over many years unanimously declare that the results are more satisfactory than with the intellectual competitions for lower grade places; that contrary to the public belief or "fallacy," as the Federal commission has called it, men of high standing in their callings are ready to compete and the commissions have no difficulty in getting eminent professional men to serve on the special rating boards.

I have in my hand a partial list of such competitions. It fills many pages and covers nearly a thousand appointments so made and the salaries range from \$3,000 to \$10,000 a year. In this way have been appointed such persons as the chief physicians of the two largest public hospitals in the United States, head engineer for the construction of the Philadelphia subway, the engi-

neer in chief for creating the great water supply system for Los Angeles, California, superintendents of streets, civil and sanitary engineers, chief librarians of large city and state libraries, playground superintendents, municipal bacteriologist, and the like. The scientific bureaus of the United States Department of Agriculture, which it is acknowledged have done the best work of this kind in the world, were all organized and carried on by chiefs selected in this way.

While many of these experts have been heads of bureaus, they are not usually heads of the departments but are experts just under them. This is a distinct disadvantage for, while they are themselves skilled and competent, their superior, who is a political officer, is able to divert the contracts to where they will do the most good to the party, and prevent many economies and improvements.

Therefore it is part of our plan to extend the system still higher. This has already been done in Los Angeles and from there we receive reports that not only are the departments free from partisan influence but there is more harmony and continuity of policy, and that the contracts are taken out of politics.

### **Assistant Secretaryships Should be Competitive**

In the National Government the cabinet officers are policy-determining and should not be included under this system, but, as President Taft and his efficiency bureau have recommended and as Postmaster-General Burleson urges for his department, the assistant secretaries or assistant postmasters-general should be selected by this competition of careers, leaving also a chance for those in the service to compete and secure by promotion higher positions, if they are fitted for them. Thus will there be, as there is in England, for example, a body of trained and educated men familiar with the history of the government departments, able to give advice and assistance to cabinet officers.

### **Standardized Pay—Efficiency Ratings**

To come now to the second of our new policies, that of securing efficiency in the public service after ap-

pointment. That is to be carried out by using scientific business organizers and efficiency engineers who will standardize work and pay, secure uniformity of titles for the same kinds of work, get rid of or brace up the careless and incompetent, abolish supernumeraries, teach foremen and bureau-chiefs how to co-operate sympathetically with subordinates, adopt better organization, and use up-to-date appliances; indeed, to carry out the plans now so much in use in large private business.

The pay of most government employees, especially those above the lower grades, is not as high as that in business houses for the same employment. At the same time there are instances of overpayment. It is not for our League to adjust these inequalities but it is a part of our program that these business experts shall recommend salaries of a fair market value and equal for equal service, consider and adjust minor grievances, hear employes or their representatives as to pay and hours, and make scientific findings. Without proper pay how can the Government secure proper service? How many strikes, such as of the London police, the French government railway men, and the New England telephone operators, would be averted?

Logically, these business experts for the government service ought to be under the control of the civil service commission. Logically, I say, because as the commissions have charge of securing efficiency at the entrance, they should also secure it throughout. In this way they can see how their tests for admission work out in practice. They can find the needs of the departments and what the titles mean, and the efficiency engineers can bring complaint of inefficiency where it can be examined into by the commissions. Added to the rest is the citizen complaint feature by which any one can call to the attention of a commission any neglect, incompetence, or waste of time that may come to his or her knowledge.

### **Chicago System Saves Millions**

This system has been tried and proved successful. Our Chicago friends saw the reigning inefficiency in

their city and county service, faced the problem, and some nine years ago instituted the system I have just described. In this way they saved several millions of dollars a year.

Let me give a few illustrations. In an institutional laundry it was suggested three more employees were needed. An efficiency engineer and a laundry expert were sent by the commission to investigate. They changed the routing of the business, repaired one machine, put in another at the cost of the annual salary of one person, and in the end got on with two persons less instead of requiring three more.

In the great Cook County hospital was established a record of the work of nurses and internes which showed at a glance any waste of time and secured proper attention for the patients.

By efficiency investigations laws were enforced. For example, the inspector of grain for the State of Illinois had passed some second-class wheat as A-1. He was brought before the commission on a hearing, charged with incompetence. There was suspicion of bribery but to prove that in court would have taken an endless trial, with the probability of failure to convict. But in a few hours with samples of A-1 grain to compare with the poorer quality passed by the inspector as A-1 and the testimony of one or two experts, the official was immediately put in a dilemma. He had either to plead inability to distinguish the grades of wheat or to admit that he had knowingly and intentionally committed a fraud. Between the two he chose to be considered incompetent and was immediately discharged on that ground. A new inspector was appointed on competition of careers and no more trouble has been experienced by the Illinois Board of Trade in regard to the grading of wheat.

### **Why Veteran Preference is Wrong**

Before finishing let me touch on one other issue, and that is the various veteran preference laws recently passed or under consideration. They do not seem to me to convey a compliment to our army re-

turning from Europe, for such preferences clearly imply that our young veterans need to have their competitors severally handicapped. I believe most of them do not need this artificial advantage. The few who do need it, need it because of inferior ability or training, and to put the inferiors in, means an injury to the Government which our boys fought to preserve.

The returning soldiers and sailors know, too, how the efficiency of the civil service was necessary for their support when fighting. Through it the supply of arms, ammunition, transportation, food and medical supplies was obtained. When the departments were efficient these came through quickly and were good; when not efficient, there was delay and just dissatisfaction.

Many legislators say that any one passing with lowest mark is "qualified" and therefore there is no harm in putting him ahead of others who have passed higher. Would such a legislator, if in charge of an office, like to have a stenographer who could do but 80 words a minute and made about 30% of mistakes put upon him instead of another who could do 140 words a minute with no mistake at all? The former would "pass" because he *can* do stenography, though of a low order.

Is it right to risk the health of a community to a sanitary inspector 30% of whose answers are wrong regarding the laws and principles of sanitation when another could be had who understood them both thoroughly?

### **Not a Patriotic Means of Rewarding Patriotism**

Altogether, artificial preferences are not a patriotic means of rewarding patriotism. Let us take away every special disadvantage arising from absence, such as loss of places on an eligible list once secured, but our heroes who refuse charity would, I believe, prefer to stand on their own merits in getting into the civil service as they did in getting into the military. Let us honor them with true honor and help them where they need help with ennobling and uplifting service.

The program of the League for the benefit of the Government is a large one. It is not merely a negative one, such as obstruction of the spoils system, but a

positive one—a patriotic endeavor promising benefit to all, the served and the serving alike.

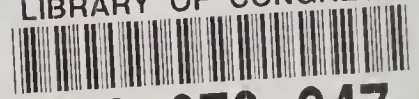
### **Arouse Business in Favor of Businesslike Methods**

We want to arouse the business men of the country and their organizations to work with us. To increase our activities, just before we entered the war the League raised contributions in money a fourfold amount and enlarged its force so to obtain publicity, field work, and a well organized office.

During the first year of the war our efforts were diverted, at the request of the Government, to help in recruiting experts for its civilian employment. After that part of our work was done some nine months ago, we began again with our efforts to extend the system both onwards and upwards and met great success. Again we appeal to our fellow countrymen, young and old, rich and poor, to join in one great effort both to purify politics and to prove that our Republic can be as capable and strong in its government as it is in its private business.



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