An Important Public Service Well Done

Dr. Walter N. Thayer
Commissioner of Correction

When one beginning his thirtieth year in State employment looks back over that period of service, and especially when those years have been spent either in institutional work or in close contact with it, he experiences a period of depression like that through which the State has been passing recently and listens to the various remedies suggested to relieve the State of some of the expense under which it is laboring, he is bound to be impressed by the lack of understanding on the part of the average man of the status of institutional employees.

In the tremendously prosperous period antedating the present period of depression, the man on the street, who was enjoying the most prosperous conditions he had ever known, was prone to look with amusement at the State employee who, in no measure, participated in the increased compensation enjoyed by the average worker in civil lines. It was about in the middle 1920's the State recognized that, while practically every other worker had received increased compensation, nothing had been done for the State employee. At this time there were some increases in pay allowed those employees who had remained faithful to their duties, and who had not been lured away by higher compensation in other fields.

The difference between the attitude of the public of the early 20's and the public of today is striking. The amused tolerance of the State employee during the prosperous days has now changed. The security of his position is viewed with envy and recently vociferous demands for pay reduction were heard on every hand.

Speaking more especially for the institutional employees, I do not feel that they ever have been over-paid when one considers the exacting nature of their employment. The

Here Comes the Bride

By Jerry Costello

Association's Vacation Camp Awaits You.
Opens July 9th.

Last year the Association fostered the organization of the State Employees' Recreational Club, Inc., the purpose of which was to take advantage of the good cooperation of the State Conservation Department, in the matter of the use of the Camp site on Meacham Lake in Franklin County as a desirable vacation camp for State workers. The Recreational Club conducted a very successful season and many workers enjoyed the cottage accommodations and the exceptional boating, bathing, fishing, tennis, and other recreational activities possible under the delightful and healthful surroundings. The camp is operated on a non-profit basis and every cent paid by guests goes to supply the best possible food, sleeping and necessary accommodations. The maximum charge at the camp will be $12.00 per week for adults. The rate for children under 10 years $6.00; and 10 to 14 years inclusive, $8.00. Make your reservations at once.

Shall We Level Up or Down?

Horatio M. Pollock, Ph.D.,
Director, Mental Hygiene Statistics

Colonel Leonard P. Ayres, speaking at a joint meeting of the American Statistical Association and the American Economic Association at Cincinnati last December, said that 1933 would be known as the year of the great debate. The topic to be debated were inflation and deflation, or the questions: Shall we level up or down? Shall we increase our money supply or our credit so as to bring prices of commodities up to the level of 1928 or 1929, or shall we reduce wages, salaries, rents, rates for public utilities, fixed charges and debts to the level of commodity prices? The question was partially answered at the recent session of Congress, and the Federal Administration has undertaken to raise the price level in accordance therewith. On its success depends the happiness and well-being of a large part of the people of this country.

It needs but a brief survey of the income and expenditures of ordinary householders to see the striking irregularities and injustices that exist in the present price structure. On the income side we find reductions from 10 to 100 per cent. Practically no wage-earners, farmers or business men now receive the income they enjoyed in 1928 and 1929. Many have lost their positions and are entirely without income; workers, who have been fortunate enough to retain their positions, have suffered severe cuts in wages. Business men until recently were losing instead of gaining. Ten million unemployed means at least ten million impoverished homes and tremendous reduction in national income.

On the expenditure side we find most remarkable conditions. Food and clothing are cheaper than in 1928. Fuel prices remain about the same in spite of poor financial re-
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Making Work More Interesting

In these days of pressure of work and increased duties, we are, without special effort, in danger of being in the position of the efficiency expert who so narrowed his interest in life that his very specialization was the means of intellectual strangulation. Nature seems to work that way, too; when a living creature over many centuries specializes in ways of living, nature adjusts his physical organism accordingly.

Routine, order and system necessarily press more rigidly on one person than on another. It is, for instance, a well known fact that persons in my profession have become interminable bores by the constant discussion of the particular "cases" they are called upon to handle. How can one run away from this danger? From my windows in the tower of the State Office Building, I look now and then over the city to the staunch hills of the Catskills. The long vista rests my eyes and my mind, and I can wander pleasantly in the fields of memory. Such pauses are extremely beneficial in escaping what might well be the tyranny of a task. The state employee who has to work day by day in one of the many institutions may have a more difficult time in avoiding a fixed life problem than his fellow worker in a state office in Albany. But everywhere for all of us, there is a bit of blue sky to look up to.

There is, too, our old friend Familiarity which, according to the adage, breeds contempt. System always tends to bind a person. Just as the treadmill worked on the spirit of the victim, so may we develop a sort of dullness and flatness at our task. The long hours of work, and the necessity of living in constant close proximity to the job seems sometimes an oppressive burden.

It isn't easy to run away from routine, depression and narrowing influences; yet we must all have change and interest. No dynamo is worth shucks until it is connected up and at work. We must not fail to notice that the most interesting people in the world are always interested in other people. "He who would have friends," says Hazlitt, "must first show himself friendly." Friendship soothes many a sore hour.

Continued on Page 6


The Civil Service System

It would be strange indeed if any institution in American life so important as the civil service system escaped entirely the demoralizing effect of the depression. In the panic occasioned by fear and in the haste of experimental adventure for recovery, not only have policies and agencies long suspected of inefficiency been attacked, but popular education, the rights of labor, and other well recognized theories have been threatened.

Public service from the standpoint of efficiency and economy is much the same as private enterprise. But from the standpoint of selection of personnel it is vastly different. Every citizen regardless of political affiliation, of religion, of race, whether rich or poor, has the right to serve the people as a public officer or employee, providing he possesses the requisite merit and fitness. The civil service system was founded to assure that political favor, personal friendship, racial or religious preference, snobbery or intolerance of any sort would not interfere with the inherent rights of citizens to prove in a common and intelligent way their merit and fitness to serve the State.

Legislation to improve business and industrial conditions, however, honestly conceived or carried out, will fail of its purpose if it destroy the principle of fair play embodied in the civil service system.

No intelligent human being expects permanent well-being for the majority of mankind unless the salaried and wage earning populations are prosperous. Making up as they do the vast preponderance of the citizens of this country, they will always be the final arbiters of the country's fate. Political, religious and racial freedom cannot be achieved without the civil service plan of public personnel administration. It is a deep and far reaching matter. Truly, as the great Theodore Roosevelt once proclaimed, the civil service system is as necessary as the common school system itself. Everyone of the State and Federal employees is vitally interested, not only in the preservation of the civil service system everywhere throughout the United States, but also in its development along wise and practical lines, because they are an integral part of that system. But they are most interested as part of the whole citizenry who cannot without loss of patriotism forsake the principle involved in firm adherence to the principle of an equal opportunity to qualify for any post within the public service.
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The Public Should
Know Their Servants
Hon. WILLIAM GORHAM RICE,
President State Civil Service Commission

(From Address at Annual Meeting
of the Civil Service Reform
Association)

As to the future, of civil service,
I desire to offer what may at first
seem to be a radical proposal. But
I feel my proposal has a sound foun­
dation, for its basis is in the State
Constitution which at the beginning
of Article V, Section 6, contains the
following words: “Appointments in
the Civil Service of the State and
all of the civil divisions thereof shall
be made according to merit and fit­
tness . . .”

The time has arrived, I believe,
when this merit and fitness declara­
tion of the Constitution should be
definitely applied to exempt and
unclassified appointments as well as
to competitive positions. Possibly
you may regard such a suggestion as
visionary and outside the pale of
practical administration. But if
consideration is given to the
suggestion, it seems to me you will
be convinced of its usefulness and
value, particularly at this time when
attention is much directed toward the
constantly enlarging scope of State
activities.

Concretely, I hope to see in the
immediate future public sentiment so
awakened that it will require that
all exempt and unclassified appoint­
ments shall be accepted only when
such appointments are made accord­
ing to disclosed merit and fitness
definitely recorded. This record,
substantiated by the signature of the
appointing authority, ought to be filed
in some public office where it will be
accessible to all citizens and tax­
payers. In other words, the recording
publicly of the qualifications of every
exempt appointee should hereafter be
an understood obligation on the part
of the appointing officer making
such exempt appointment.

The Governor of New York State
already essentially follows this course
in the case of officials appointed by
him. By means of a newspaper
press statement, which promptly
reaches readers throughout the State,
he announces not only the name but
also the qualifications, that is to say
the merit and fitness, of each person
whom he selects for appointment.

My proposal is that a record for
subordinate departmental appoint­
ments should be required from and
be filed by all appointing officers.
The principle can well be applied to
all exempt appointments in cities,
counties, towns and villages.

Public sentiment, it seems to me,
can be so awakened at this time that
it will become the natural thing to
expect always such an authoritative
statement, filed in a public office,
available to the press, giving the
qualifications of all civil appointees.
The publication of such a statement
would be a matter of news quite as
interesting as the name of an ap­
pointee. The procedure suggested
would honor those who are qualified,
equally it would disclose those who
lack fitness.

Is not the proposal reasonable?
In exempt and unclassified appoint­
ments, the appointing official is allow­
ced entire freedom of choice. Should
he not, in proper regard for the tax­
payers whose money pays the salary
of his appointee, tell why he chooses
a particular person? And is it not
desirable that all citizens should
know from each appointing agent of
the State exactly what kind of merit
and fitness has moved him to a
choice? Indeed should not every
appointing officer count it a privilege
to admit his fellow citizens to his
confidence in this matter of appoint­
ments?

Finally I would specially call to
your attention that each appointing
official of this State has solemnly
sworn upon assuming office to obey
the constitutional provision requiring
appointments to be according to
merit and fitness. Is it anything
out of the way to ask that in every
case such qualifications as are found
existing should be definitely and
openly recorded. To me this seems
only a proper administrative require­
ment.

While the idea which I have just
presented may at first seem a counsel
of perfection, nevertheless I think
reflection will justify it as a reasona­
ably progressive step in civil service
procedure. I believe it to be an ad­
vance step which will assuredly vivify
an existing constitutional declaration,
a step which will surely raise the
standard of all appointments, a step
which will make more effective the
whole organization of the State
government.
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Making Work Interesting
Continued from Page 2

It is impossible for me to be specific about the different avenues of interest that surround the state employee in institutions; one might begin by developing a certain attention to things outside of the job itself, and before long the job will begin to have new aspects. Find a hobby—get away from the ego centered or the over concern with the pathological, and you will be surprised at what happens to your environment. There is also a lifetime study in any phase of institution life, as well as in life outside the institution.

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Business indices are showing a healthy response to an awakened public confidence.

The Federal administration is appealing to citizens everywhere to cooperate toward the successful application of the laws recently enacted. This legal machinery needs men. The human element capable of coping with each of the tremendous problems which it is sought to solve is the indispensable necessity of the times. The success or failure of the government's efforts will rest wholly upon the integrity and ability of the human beings selected. This is a 100 per cent civil service function. Government is in its most vital parts a personnel problem. Everything good and everything bad that results from government is a reflection of human action. Salaried workers everywhere and in every line of human endeavor will be affected by the new Federal Laws. Organizations are the means of giving life to cooperation. Civil service employees, fully organized in a solid, state-wide Association is needed at this time as membership for 1933 goal!

Help the 10,500 members of this Association on to the “15,000 membership” goal!

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