

Oregon State Government and the Merit System

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The merit system of public personnel administration may be described as the practice of selecting public employees on the basis of qualifications, together with the assurance of relative permanency of employment contingent upon meritorious service. Further, "under the merit system, if it works ideally, appointments, promotions, demotions, and removals are made on a merit basis. No political or religious considerations, nor in fact any considerations other than the competence, trustworthiness, and efficiency of the present or prospective worker, are permitted to affect employment processes. Employees are selected for entrance to or promotion in the service by tests of fitness which, so far as practicable, are made competitive. The persons rated highest in the tests being given the first chance of original appointment or promotion. Salary increases are made in accordance with demonstrated efficiency of employees, and demotions and removals are made only for the good of the service, not for political or religious reasons. (Problems of the American Public Service, New York, 1935, p. 82.)

Judged by these criteria, the Oregon state government generally does not utilize the merit system of personnel

administration. Employment as a reward for partisan political allegiance is a recognized and accepted practice. Dismissal of an employee from the service for any cause is a common procedure.

The personnel practices of the Oregon state government agencies are not of uniform standard. One former state officer who dealt with state government personnel practices for an extended period of time has described them as "chaotic". When the state budget office at one time undertook to establish a uniformity in salary policy throughout the state government, glaring discrepancies were discovered in salaries from department to department for the same duties. One of the conditions under which the study was made was agreement that there would be no downward adjustment of salaries of incumbents. Consequently, it may be assumed that such discrepancies persist. Position titles were found frequently to have no relation to the actual duties and were often merely an excuse for extravagant salaries. Each department carried on its recruiting and training procedures without reference to any central personnel agency. No machinery was provided for the exchange or transfer of employees from department to department.

Other students of the Oregon State government personnel policies have noted a tendency of some departments to play "spoils" politics more than others. A change of administration is a signal for a wholesale turnover in some departments; others are quite

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