

Honest Support of the Merit System

The League of Women Voters has achieved a proud record in their efforts throughout the years since 1922 supporting and sponsoring merit system legislation in many state legislatures as well as in congress.

During those 20 years, the league has had much experience with merit system laws and with legislatures and with politicians. In a booklet published June, 1940, "The Awkward Age in Civil Service," we find on page 38 the following appraisal:

"Legislatures and political parties may give lip service to the merit system but they are apt to avoid positive action. One of the more obvious ways of giving the appearance of support without the substance is to postpone the day of reckoning."

Oregon is a relatively young state, but the rapid growth of the state service in the last decade has made the merit system an urgent need, a development not at once apparent to citizens located up State, who have no direct contact with conditions in the capitol city and in the metropolitan area surrounding Portland. State employees are in an advantageous position to observe the need of the extension of the merit principle in the public service, and it is an indication of sincere interest in the State's welfare that State employees should as a group support this principle. The same publication of the League of Women Voters quoted above, speaks on pages 35 and 36 of the attitude of employees towards the merit system as follows:

"The suspicion that the merit system will not be in their own best interests can make the employee group a stumbling block in a merit campaign. In New Hampshire, the League of Women Voters, in working for a

merit law, has found that practically the only significant opposition in that State comes from the employees themselves. In consequence, special educational activities have been carried on for the benefits of that group. Likewise in Cleveland in 1938, securing the support of the employees was one of the most important features of the campaign which brought the labor positions into the civil service system. Once convinced of the value of the merit system, public employees are a source of strength. In the fight to secure passage of the Rampick Postmasters Bill by Congress, the employee organizations provided telling support. Similarly in some of the campaigns for State merit legislation, the employee groups have been strong proponents."

Many employees and officials have long years of conscientious service for the state to their credit, often in specialized or technical fields. When the wage scales of the state and private industry are compared, it must be acknowledged that loyalty and devotion has had much to do with the continuation of these employees in the state service. When employees of this type endorse the merit principle, their endorsement should receive serious consideration. The Oregon State Employees Association, composed of this type of employee, and having forsworn pressure methods and seeking no unfair advantages, has endorsed the merit system principle, but has not assumed to specify definite provisions for such legislation. They ask the best, most improved and up to date merit system law a conscientious and honest legislature can evolve.

Honest legislators will receive all assistance and support towards achieving such a merit system law that a campaign of education and support by the Oregon State Employees Association can extend.