

Modern Merit System in Practice

From a Pamphlet Prepared by the National Civil Service Reform League.

The modern merit system is a practical and essential tool of good public administration.

It is a far cry from defensive hamstringing procedures which until recent years prevailed in most civil service jurisdictions, and persist even today in unprogressive communities.

To make known in all communities the nature and advantage of a *real merit system* is the task of every citizen who would make democracy strong within.

SERVICE . . .

Opportunity to compete for public employment is only one purpose of the merit system. Its *primary* object is to enable administrators to secure promptly and without the wrangling and waste of spoils politics, highly competent employees when and as they are needed. The modern merit system is welcomed by appointing officers because *it can render service*.

Method: The national defense appropriation bills of 1940 proposed to exempt defense employees from the merit system. Officials of the War and Navy Departments appeared before Congressional Committees and *insisted upon the merit system as absolutely essential* to speedy recruitment of qualified employees. They did not relish the delay caused by politicians wrangling over appointments. The exemption was stricken from the bills.

COOPERATION . . .

Appointing officers welcome the merit system when it is a prompt and flexible tool which aids them in their work. Antagonisms which spring from suspicion, haggling and policing under the old civil service process disappear. Today, under modern merit practice,

operating officials appreciate the service they get, as well as protection from political pressure.

Method: Operating departments survey prospective personnel needs and work with the central agency to establish standards, tests and appropriate eligible lists to meet prospective operating needs.

FLEXIBILITY . . .

Restrictive rules, reluctance to consult with appointing officers, and continual ignoring of their needs are no longer part of modern practice. Liaison and understanding enable the modern merit system to meet the requirements of appointing officers as they arise, with sufficient flexibility to furnish round pegs for round holes and square pegs for square holes.

Method: Selective certification under proper safeguards is a modern practice for solving an old basic difficulty in civil service employment. Formerly the top three eligibles on a general list were often certified to appointing officers, even for a specialized job. For instance, an appointing officer might need a public relations expert with particular knowledge of taxation problems. Under the old practice he would often be forced to select an individual with general public relations experience but without necessary knowledge of taxation matters. A modern civil service commission can certify, from a general register, the highest eligibles thereon who have had *actual experience in the specialty needed*. Time is saved. Friction is avoided. It is no longer necessary to go through the time-consuming process of holding an expensive special examination when there are already, somewhere on the general register, a number of qualified specialists.