

Where Do We Go From Here?

State Employment:

Past, Present and Future

By Virgil G. O'Neil

It is said that a person should take stock of himself occasionally to see where he has been, where he is and where he is going. To each of us, there comes a time to pause, reflect, consider and plan. As State employees round out the first quarter of 1949, they may well become freshened in memories of the past, informed of the present, and advised of what the future may hold.

What of the Years Prior to 1943?

It is realized that less than one-third of the State's present employees were in State service prior to 1943. For the benefit of the nearly 8,000 employees who have been in the service for only a few months or so, it seems wise to review State working conditions of the not so long ago.

Without casting unsavory reflection, let it be known that there was little uniformity in policies between the various departments, boards, institutions and bureaus. Each agency hired, fired and paid about as it pleased; vieing with each other for employees, and guarding jealously their independent policies of favoritism. All agencies were tinged with autocratic attitudes toward their employees and some were downright Simon Legrees. The ideas of providing good public service to the public were as numerous as fleas on a dog's back. Public service was burdened with hidden pensioners, personal favorites, and beset with other personnel inefficiencies; policies changed with the wind!

It is true that many efficient administrators held office in that period and many faithful and honest other employees also gave their best efforts to State service, but under what handicaps and with what small appreciation.

Some Changes Made Since 1943

In 1943 there was a voice heard "crying in the wilderness"—a prophetic

voice! At first it was a mild murmur, about fifty strong—the nucleus of the present Oregon State Employees Association. A small group of employees joined themselves to see what could be done to bring a new concept of public service to the attention of Old Man Oregon! They were weary of conditions as they had been and foresaw the trouble that public service in this State has been experiencing these last few years. They felt it necessary to have some changes made if public agencies were to render efficient and economical service to the public.

A civil service act was presented to the 1943 legislature. It was defeated. A retirement plan for public employees was talked and promoted. Nothing happened. A few administrators were timidly approached with some suggestion which would help employees, eliminate waste and promote the general welfare. Few were heard, fewer bore fruit.

These few bold employees, in jeopardy of losing their jobs because of their open alarm about conditions, attracted more and more employees to their cause and the OSEA began to grow. By 1945, they numbered nearly 3,000 members. This wide and rapid acceptance of OSEA objectives was indicative of the real need for improvement in State services and the appreciation of that need by the employees.

Due in large part to OSEA sponsorship and forceful presentation, and with the aid of other public-spirited persons, leagues and associations both the Civil Service Act and Retirement Act were approved in 1945 by a wise legislature, and the first two major steps in the improvement of Oregon's public service were taken.

Subsequent years have seen the OSEA grow to over 4,500 members