

The Value of Examinations Under Civil Service; Fairness Required

As an important part of Oregon's Civil Service Act, written and oral examinations are provided to test the applicant's qualifications for a job and to select the best qualified employees for promotion. This is a function of the Civil Service Commission under the laws.

Created in 1945 and functioning since 1946, the Civil Service Commission has made much progress in getting the system working, in spite of a small appropriation, small staff and considerable reluctance on the part of many departments to cooperate with them.

The preparing of examinations and the grading of them is of paramount importance to the state's welfare due to their use in selecting the person who is to provide service to the state. If they are fair in their coverage, pertinent to the position they are used for, and are graded properly they serve well and are worth their cost. They must be respected for their fairness to the employee or the employee and employer alike will have no confidence in their value.

Examinations Are Important

It is an important matter, personally, to every employee to feel that he is being treated fairly. His career and earnings are in large measure affected by the promotions and job-selections made on the basis of examinations. The employer, likewise, should be interested in getting the right people in the right jobs.

We are informed that examinations are now set up for less than half of the state's classified service employees. Put boldly, that means about 5,000 employees who have less protection under Civil Service than their fellow employees; also, that about 50 per cent of state positions are not now filled by people definitely found qualified by open competitive examinations; also

that many promotions and dismissals can be made at the whim of an appointing authority! This state of affairs is a breeding bed for dissatisfaction and low morale amongst employees. Perhaps some department heads would assist the understaffed Civil Service Department in getting proper examinations under way, even to the point of preparing good ones for approval by the Civil Service Commission.

Exams by Outside Agencies

Perhaps due to the present understaffed office force of the Civil Service department, one state department has seen fit to require many of its employees to pass examinations given by a professional board located in Portland and to be registered by them before they will even be considered for promotions to any position above an intermediate level. Of course, it happens that the Civil Service Commission does hold examinations for these same higher classifications as well as most others in this department but the agency in question pleads its position on the grounds that "the public reputation of the Department in Oregon is in part determined by the size of its registered force." It is unfortunate, but true, that this required outside examination is considerably broader in its subject matter than the knowledge required to fill any of this department's specialized positions at any level and it is highly questionable whether the "public reputation" sought is more desirable than the true ability of the employee who fills the job. This is the only case known where the Civil Service Commission is in effect, by-passed in its examining capacity under the law.

Many employees would be happy to take a fair examination even outside of Civil Service on the duties of a position higher than their present one, and even at the employee paid fee of