

Removals in Civil Service

Of the many criticisms levelled by business men — sometimes justly and sometimes unjustly — against civil service practices and regulations, the most frequent is that it is difficult to the point of impossibility to discharge a civil service employee unless he commits a major crime. It is a popular myth that a civil service job is a lifetime job. Many an employee has believed this, and has had the amazed reaction, "They can't do this to me!" when faced with removal charges.

The Citizens' Committee for the Hoover Report, by giving publicity to one or two extreme cases of unjustified delay in removing incompetent Federal employees in a laudable effort to stress the need for better personnel practices, has unwittingly added to the general misunderstanding of what the Civil Service Act really provides.

This certainly is the most misunderstood area of public personnel administration. Because of the confusion, the United States Civil Service Commission recently issued a statement explaining the basic Federal law and regulations governing removals.

Public opinion regarding the civil service is important in a democracy. The National Civil Service League wishes to draw public attention to the constant, dependable services regularly being performed by civil service workers. We believe that most public employees are competent. We believe that they can be even better, and that they want to be better. The best path to improvement is through more adequate public information and understanding.

There is little doubt but that the prestige of public employees has been impaired by the widespread opinion

that they cannot be adequately supervised or disciplined.

Also, many honest, competent administrators have had their enthusiasm for the merit system dissipated by frustration caused by the complexities of laws, rules, directives and political pressures.

The Federal Service

Non-veteran Employees: The Federal Civil Service Act requires merely that a non-veteran be furnished by his department head with a written statement of reasons why he is to be removed and have an opportunity to answer. The department head is the sole judge of the sufficiency of the defense, and the Civil Service Commission has no authority to review the case except where prima facie evidence of political or religious prejudice is shown.

Veterans: Under the Veteran Preference Act of 1944, Federal employees who are war veterans are entitled to a review by the Civil Service Commission in every case of removal. The Civil Service Commission has authority to overrule the department head and order reinstatement.

The report of the Task Force on Personnel Administration to the Hoover Commission explained "the apparent apathy on the part of supervisors at all levels to weed out and remove whitecollar employees whose work performance is sub-standard, in part as follows:

"... Federal personnel officers point out that Government agencies are subject to other pressures which necessitate great caution in effecting the removal of unsatisfactory employees. The right of veterans to appeal to the Commission imposes a definite restraint on the operating