

The Public Service Association has asked that Regulation 32 should be repealed, and that Regulation 27 be amended in the direction of enabling an officer to act on certain conditions. The Commissioners are of opinion that the prohibition from active part in public politics makes for greater contentment in the Public Service and enables officers more easily to render loyal and more efficient service.

In this connection the remarks of the Commission in England are interesting :—

The question may be stated in general terms thus : Is it necessary or desirable in the public interest to place any restriction upon the exercise of full rights of citizenship by those citizens who are members of the Civil Service ?

In the first place, we have little doubt that complete liberty of political action for all officials alike would inevitably result in frequent conflicts between the desires and interests of the officer as a citizen and his duty as an official, and that such conflicts could not fail to have a disastrous effect on the morale of the Public Service.

Such conflicts may occur without any direct breach of official confidence. Let us suppose an officer of the Treasury or of one of the great revenue Departments speaking publicly upon some controversial topic of taxation which might be the subject of acute party difference, such as the recent licensing legislation or the fiscal question ; or an officer of the War Department taking a prominent part in controversy as to the merits of voluntary and compulsory service ; or, again, to take a less extreme instance, let us suppose that an officer criticizes the policy, not of the Department in which he serves, but that of some other Department, or the policy of Your Majesty's Government for the time being as a whole : in all these cases there could be no doubt as to the impropriety of the officer's conduct and its inconsistency with his position as a permanent official.

We have already pointed out that the Civil Service is now being called upon to take a greater share in the burden of administration than was known a generation ago ; and it cannot be denied that the success or failure of much legislation of a controversial character depends now much more largely than formerly upon administrative action. The conduct of the Civil Service will, therefore, come more frequently under public notice than it has done, and in these circumstances it would, we think, be disastrous if the feeling should arise that the effectiveness of a legislative policy were in any degree dependent upon the political bias of those administering it.

Speaking generally, we think that if restrictions on the political activities of public servants were withdrawn two results would probably follow : The public might cease to believe, as we think they do now with reason believe, in the impartiality of the permanent Civil Service, and Ministers might cease to feel the well-merited confidence which they possess at present in the loyal and faithful support of their official subordinates ; indeed, they might be led to scrutinize the utterances or writings of such subordinates and to select for positions of confidence only those whose sentiments were known to be in political sympathy with their own.

If this were so the system of recruitment by open competition would prove but a frail barrier against Ministerial patronage in all but the earlier years of service ; the Civil Service would cease to be in fact an impartial non-political body, capable of loyal service to all Ministers and parties alike ; the change would soon affect the public estimation of the Service, and the result would be destructive of what undoubtedly is at present one of the greatest advantages of our administrative system, and one of the most honourable traditions of our public life.

For the preceding reasons we think that with regard to political questions a proper reserve and reticence both in speech and writing should be observed by the members of the General and Professional Civil Service, and that a similar obligation should be imposed on officers belonging to other branches which are directly connected with departmental administration. . . .

BOARD OF APPEAL.

The Public Service Act provides for the appointment of a Public Service Board of Appeal, consisting of three persons appointed or elected as follows : (a) Two persons, one of whom shall be a member of the Public Service, to be appointed in that behalf by the Governor-General, and one of whom shall be appointed by the Governor-General as Chairman ; (b) two officers to be elected by the officers of the Public Service, only one of whom shall act as a member of the Board in any appeal.

The Commissioners have no representative on the Board as at present constituted, and as information as to the reasons actuating the Board in its finding is not usually given, the result at times is that decisions are arrived at which cannot be understood either by the Commissioners or the Department concerned. It is felt that until the Commissioners are given direct representation on the Board it will not be possible to secure a greater measure of satisfaction.

STORES.

In 1913 a Stores Tender Board was established under the Public Service Act. While this Board did useful work, it was recognized that it was advantageous to extend the powers of such a Board to cover all Departments of State.