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THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

JAN 25 1945

MEMORANDUM for the President.

For some time I have been disturbed by the gradual whittling away of the authority of the heads of the departments in personnel administration, and specifically the efforts of the Civil Service Commission to widen its controls. The Commission would probably defend its actions as looking to the improvement of Federal personnel administration generally and the expedition of the war program. I do not quarrel with these objectives, but I do think that the Commission too often has gone beyond the bounds of legitimate cooperative leadership and encroached on the administrative responsibilities of the department heads, and that it is working toward more centralization of authority within itself.

This philosophy is finding its way into legislation, I feel sure, with some influence from the Commission. To illustrate, the Ramspeck Act of November 26, 1940, set up Boards of Review on Efficiency Ratings, with the Chairman a representative of the Civil Service Commission. The findings of these Boards are final. The recent Veterans' Preference Act of 1944 gives veteran employees the right to appeal to the Commission over adverse action by the head of the Department. A member of the Commission stated publicly a few months ago that such right of appeal should be extended to all employees of the Federal Government, either by Executive order or by legislation. Pending legislation to authorize health programs in the Government departments would make the programs subject to the approval of the Commission. The Commission has recommended that it be given authority to coordinate pay schedules for all wage board positions in the Federal Government.

Administrative authority has been assumed by the Commission and some of its actions have been arbitrary. In January 1944 it requested elaborate personnel utilization surveys by the departments and quarterly reports to the Commission of the results in terms of personnel savings, reassignments for better utilization, and decreased turnover and absenteeism. I felt that this was an unwarranted interference with administrative responsibilities and that it was burdensome. As you know, I protested at the time. In promotions to certain positions the Commission has reserved to itself prior approval of the administrative selection, notwithstanding that the usual time and experience standards are met. Educational requirements have recently been eliminated from examinations for certain professional and technical positions utilized by this Department without an opportunity for us to participate in the policy. There have been other leverages and pressures, direct and indirect, in training, direct recruitment, and other phases of personnel administration.

Lest I be misunderstood, let me say that I do not wish to see a negative and weak central personnel agency. Also, there are many things which the present Civil Service Commission has done to aid departments during the war which deserve

commendation, and in fairness I must add that the day-to-day transactions between our personnel office and members of the Commission's staff have been carried on in a cooperative and helpful fashion. Positive leadership is essential to maintain good personnel administration in the Federal Government, but it is vitally important that it be exercised through advisory methods and not by creeping authoritative control.

The head of a department is charged with the responsibility for its administration, and it seems to me almost axiomatic that he should have full control over the personnel to do the job, so long as he operates within the framework of the merit system and complies with Executive policies. And if he is worthy of his job he will have no less desire than the Civil Service Commission for efficient administration and to dispense justice in the application of merit principles. As one department head I am glad to have the services of the Civil Service Commission, in its normal function; I am glad to avail myself of advisory service that will help solve any of our personnel administration problems, but I do not welcome its intrusion directly or indirectly into the business administration of the Department.

The purpose of this memorandum is to suggest that it may be timely to define the limitations of the role of the Civil Service Commission in personnel administration.

Harold L. Fikes
Secretary of the Interior.