

The Federal Spotlight

AFL Council Fights Move To Merge Retirement Setups

By Joseph Young

The AFL Government Employees Council has informed the special Congressional-appointed committee studying the Government's retirement system that it strongly opposes any move that would combine or even supplement civil service retirement benefits with social security.

In a recent meeting with the committee, leaders of the council, which represents Federal employe unions with more than 500,000 members, said that new liberalized benefits should be enacted within the framework of the civil service retirement system rather than augmenting it by social security.



The committee, which was created by Congress to study and recommend changes in the Government's retirement system, is now hearing the views of various employe groups in connection with its project. The committee has not yet decided what it will recommend. It will consider the views of actuaries and financial experts before drafting its proposals that are due to be submitted to Congress early next year.

The AFL Federal employe leaders told the committee that they were fearful that linking civil service retirement with social security would eventually cause the disintegration of the civil service retirement system.

The employe leaders strongly urged liberalizing Government employes' survivorship insurance benefits, which in most cases are higher under social security. They also urged increasing benefits for short-term Federal employes, the benefits of which are also greater under social security.

But these improvements should be made within the framework of the civil service retirement system, the union leaders declared. The adamant opposition to even supplemental social security benefits came as a surprise to some committee members. It had always been known that employe groups are strongly opposed to merging civil service retirement with social security. But it had been thought that employes would not object to supplemental social security benefits such as survivorship insurance and the like.

The AFL employe leaders apparently feel that any connection with social security, how-

ever slight, would give Congress the excuse to abolish the civil service retirement system eventually. They stress the fact that for career employes who work most of their adult life in the Government, civil service retirement benefits are far greater than those provided by social security.

OTHER PROPOSALS — The employe leaders also urged the committee to draft proposals that would eventually bring the 800,000 Government indefinite workers under civil service retirement. These employes are now under social security.

The employe officials also proposed that short-term Federal workers be given credit under the civil service retirement system for their term of service, so that if they ever return to Government they can continue their civil service retirement coverage.

The committee was asked to back increased annuities for retired Federal workers and to urge elimination of the cut in pension that a retired worker must take if his wife is to receive benefits when he dies.

Also, a lower retirement age, especially for employes hit in reductions-in-force, was advocated.

H. Eliot Kaplan, New York attorney and civil service expert,

presided at the meeting. Mr. Kaplan is committee chairman. The other members are the Secretaries of Defense and Treasury, chairman of the Civil Service Commission, chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, and director of the Budget Bureau. All of them were present or had representatives at the meeting.

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OVERSIGHT — An apparent oversight in the new veterans preference law approved by Congress deprives the wives of disabled veterans and the widows of those killed in action from getting top consideration for civil service jobs. Until now they have held these rights.

The new law was aimed primarily at requiring veterans to make a passing grade in civil service exams before getting 5 and 10 points preference. It also allows only veterans with at least 10 per cent compensable disability to go to the top of civil service job registers.

However, the way the new law is written it does not include wives and widows among those who can go to the top of civil service job registers, as they could previously. Wives and widows still receive 10 points veterans preference, but they can no longer be placed ahead of other eligibles on civil service job lists.

Undoubtedly, this is due to an oversight on the part of those who drafted the law, rather than any deliberate move to deprive the women of these rights. The American Legion said it will ask Congress when it convenes in January to rectify this oversight.

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