PETER'S PRINCIPLE

(In the interest of efficiency, soil scientists need to keep informed of the latest developments in management analysis. The following contribution from an anonymous source explains a recently developed principle in this area. Evidently one uses this principle to evaluate himself by measuring the length of time that he has held his present position. - Ed.)

Parkinson's Law seems about to be pushed aside to make room for an even more penetrating truth about bureaucracy.

The new canon is the Peter Principle, formulated by Dr. Laurence J. Peter, a professor at the University of Southern California.

The Peter Principle is this: In each hierarchy, whether it be government, business, etc., each employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence. Every post tends to be occupied by an employee incompetent to execute its duties.

Peter's theory is that each employee is promoted up the rungs of the organization ladder until he reaches a position for which he is incompetent to fulfill his duties. He then, of course, is not promoted any further, but neither is he removed. He remains for the rest of his career in a job which he is not capable of handling.

Peter notes that some critics have mistakenly seen his theory as placing in the hands of lower-level employees a means of ridiculing their superiors.

Not so, says Peter. The lowest rank of every bureaucracy or hierarchy must contain its own share of incompetents. True, he says, some competent people are being added at this lower level through recruitment, but they are being rapidly drawn off by promotion.