

County Patronage Waste Is Put At \$5 Million Yearly

Patronage is the name of the game and Cook County taxpayers are losing at least \$5.5 million a year while the County Board plays it.

That is the estimated financial waste found by a TRIBUNE and Better Government Association investigation of inflated salaries and padded payrolls for 1,500 blue collar workers who maintain county buildings.

The game plan of Cook County politicians is simple and to the point. Payrollers are not to be laid off for efficiency or economic reasons unless they are immediately given another job.

Retaining the huge expensive patronage army was considered more important than approving a plan which could have led to the saving of millions of dollars to a government hard-pressed for money to continue vital services.

Shelving the money-saving proposal submitted by a management firm is a typical example of the waste of millions of dollars in Cook County government detailed by the long study by investigators.

The report by Frank M. Whiston & Co. includes an operating budget for the County-City Hall buildings. Approval of the plan would have brought about \$1 million a year savings in operating and maintaining the buildings.

But, even more important, additional millions could have been cut from operating budgets in other county buildings by following the efficiency suggestions made by the management company.

County officials sometimes accept a money-saving proposal if the "unwritten rule" on patronage jobs is observed.

The Audy Juvenile Home requested permission to contract for its laundry service with a private firm and dismantle the laundry room in the home.

Laundry Costs Excessive

Quick approval was granted when Audy Home officials promised there would be no loss of patronage jobs. The five laundry room workers were given other jobs in an institution already overloaded with payrollers.

Cook County institutions spend more than \$1.5 million a year for laundry services, the cost ranging from 10 to 30 cents a pound. Most private hospitals here spend about 8 cents a pound.

A survey of Midwest hospitals by the Hospital Administrative Services [H. A. S.], a branch of the American Hospital Asso-

Task Force Report

This report by THE TRIBUNE and Better Government Association is the third in a series on waste in county government. The series was compiled by the TRIBUNE's Task Force director George Bliss and reporters Philip Caputo, William Currie, William Jones, and Pamela Zekman.

ciation, found the average cost per pound for laundry in institutions having more than 400 beds was 7 cents a pound.

Based on H. A. S. rates, Cook County is spending about \$600,000 a year too much for laundry service.

Moreover, the investigation found that state and federal

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government agencies have functioned efficiently at a fraction of the cost in numerous operating areas when compared with the politically plagued, cumbersome and highly-expensive Cook County way of doing things.

Proposal of Plan C

The Whiston Co. plan proposed that, beginning in 1968, the Public Building Commission should take over entire responsibility for operating and maintaining the County-City Hall buildings. Whiston is the late president of the Chicago Board of Education and was a close friend of Mayor Daley.

The proposal called for a sharp cut in personnel at a saving of about \$1 million a year. More important, it called for a private management company to operate the buildings. Other government agencies have experienced unprecedented saving when they hired professionals, who quickly disposed of the costly patronage employment system.

Plan's Savings Listed

Some of the savings of the Whiston plan include:

- Five full-time window washers. Current budgets have 13 window washers.

- Whiston suggested that 19 men would be enough at the heating plant, which is in the City Hall side. [This was before

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[TRIBUNE Staff Photo]

Manually operated elevator in County Building. Studies have shown that elevators could be operated automatically, ending most operator jobs.

Reveal Yearly Patronage Costs of \$5 Million in County

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the City Hall plant was dismantled and the Civic Center began providing the buildings with steam heat.] Currently the two buildings, which have no heating plants, have a combined staff of 23 heating employees and pay the Civic Center \$189,000 a year for heat.

- Six elevator starters and two elevator operators. There are now five starters and 21 operators.

- A total of 13 tradesmen—four electricians, two plumbers, five painters and two carpenters. The buildings now have a combined staff of at least 54 tradesmen, 47 for the county and seven for the city. The figure is probably much higher because city tradesmen are assigned from a central office and there is no specific breakdown of buildings.

- Cut the security force to 10 men from 12.

Plan Bogs Down

Robert W. Christensen, executive director of the Public Building Commission, said the City Council hesitated to approve the plan because of the provision for reduction of employees. It eventually was passed by the Council but it bogged down in the County Board.

"It would have been a little more efficient but they [the county politicians] felt they didn't want to give up the personnel," he said.

In reality, the Whiston plan still calls for more workers than are needed when compared with the total operating costs of the State of Illinois Building, 160 N. La Salle St. The building is about the same total of gross square feet as the County Building, which is less than a block away.

Illinois officials decided several years ago that an enormous saving could be made by discharging janitorial and other employees and retaining a janitorial firm to operate the building.

Cost Differences Shown

Altho a number of variables are involved, such as the traffic in the buildings, the following comparisons clearly show the vast differences in operating costs between the county and state buildings.

- The state pays \$252,933 to the G. A. Millard Co. for janitorial services for its building, or 60 cents per square foot. The county spends 99 cents per square foot for the Criminal Courts Building and 89 cents per square foot for the downtown county building. Wages for the janitorial staff in the

county building total more than \$500,000 a year.

- The state has a \$16,380-a-year contract with Standard Window Cleaning Co. The county spends \$74,136 for eight window washers in the county building and \$46,560 for five men in the Criminal Courts Building.

- The state building has only five heating plant engineers, with salaries totaling \$67,373. The county spends \$167,261 in salaries for a 13-man staff in a building which, unlike the state building, lacks boilers and other essentials to comprise a heating plant.

- The state building has only one carpenter and one electrician on its staff. The state contracts out about \$100,000 a year of maintenance and rehabilitation work for a total expenditure of \$131,475, including wages of the two men. The county building has 47 tradesmen at an annual cost of \$644,455.

An even more striking comparison is that with the Dirksen Federal Building, which spends 31 cents per square foot for janitorial services. The federal building spends about \$35,000 a year more for this work than does the county building, but the federal building is about 2½ times larger.

The county, with its window washing staff, should have the cleanest windows in the city.

County officials say that the 55-man window washing staff which was paid \$462,984 in 1971 is the hardest-working group of

window washers in Chicago, and probably in America.

Washing windows is but one of the staff's many chores, which include shoveling snow and moving furniture.

"I congratulate the window washers," said J. Terrence Brunner, executive director of the B. G. A. "But I wonder what that army of janitors and tradesmen are doing if the window washers are forced to do other jobs. I've been informed that the county has contracted out for moving furniture. It

sounds like the game of musical chairs."

Save by Contracting

Most other public buildings and privately-owned buildings obtain substantial savings by contracting for window washers. For example, cleaning windows of the Audy Home and the Criminal Courts Building costs \$26,000 more a year than the federal building, which has almost 1 million more square feet of space and many more windows than the two county buildings.

happy and to sometimes award a higher-paying title to a deserving votegetter.

"The marble polishers receive \$6.50 an hour, almost double the pay for similar work in private industry and agencies of other governments in Chicago.

"We must budget marble polishers because polishing marble is a tough job, with the use of acid and other materials," a county official explained.

"We have marble polishers and other such job titles because the unions tell us to," said another official.

The qualifications for the job are not that simple, said a county marble polisher who was interviewed by THE TRIBUNE.

"First," he said, "you must have a letter from your ward committeeman. Next, you make sure that you get out the vote in your precinct. Then you buy tickets to the fund-raisers, such as golf outings, picnics and dinners. You must pay your ward dues. After all that you polish marble. I'm sort of inexperienced. I sometimes mistake cement for marble."

Operators of downtown private buildings have contracts with the janitors union to pay janitors 6½ cents an hour extra when the maintenance of marble takes up most of their work day.

Richard Vawter of the General Services Administration said the federal government has no titles such as marble polisher, altho federal buildings in Washington, D. C., have much marble. The polishing is done by laborers who are

paid \$2.20 an hour, Vawter said.

The county employs more than 400 building tradesmen who are paid a total of more than \$5 million a year. While they also receive generous fringe benefits, their total take-home pay far surpasses that of their counterparts in private industry.

Electricians in the private sector are lucky to average an income of \$12,000 a year. The county's 53 electricians are paid an average of \$16,224 a year and the average county tradesman receives \$14,397. At Hines Veterans Hospital the average annual pay for tradesmen is \$10,578. Most of the electricians for the county do maintenance work but receive the much higher rate paid to construction workers.

Other Costs High

Cook County Hospital, where hundreds of thousands of dollars in contracts are being awarded to renovate buildings deteriorated from neglect, has 162 tradesmen at total annual wages of \$2,511,409.

A top Cook County Jail official, who requested that his name not be published, said he has been puzzled for years about why the county employs so many tradesmen. He said the County Jail has 15 plumbers and that fact "has always bothered me" because money is needed to increase the guard staff.

"The inmates just couldn't wreck that many toilets to keep 15 plumbers busy," he said. "We could save a fortune by contracting work."

But when the opportunity to

cut the millions of dollars in waste came up during recent budget hearings, the County Board barely paused before approving the 1972 construction and maintenance budget.

No Questions Asked

Altho the budget involved more than \$6 million and more than 400 men, John Galvin, assistant superintendent of construction, was not asked one serious question about that department's operations.

The only discussion came up when Finance Committee Chairman Jerome Huppert made a joke at the expense of absent Commissioner Charles F. Chaplin. Chaplin is a traditional critic of inflated payrolls.

"If Charles Chaplin were here he would ask how many bricklayers are in the department," Huppert said, drawing laughter from fellow commissioners.

Assistant Supt. Galvin said there are three bricklayers and the matter was dropped.

Later it was learned that the county bought 20,500 bricks last year, which officials said comprised the work of the three bricklayers.

A survey in 1967 found that a bricklayer then laid an average of 727 bricks a day, compared with about 2,000 a day around 1900.

The Cook County bricklayers, based on working 200 days a year laid an average of 34 bricks a day in 1971, if they laid all of the 20,500 bricks bought last year.

Tomorrow: The civil Defense Commission, a political dumping ground.