

\$1.6 Million Wasted Yearly

Bare 136 Needless County Jobs

Each year, more than \$1.6 million in Cook County taxpayers' money goes up in smoke.

That is the estimated overexpenditure by county government on padded payrolls for heating plant staffs in five major county building complexes, an investigation by THE TRIBUNE Task Force and Better Government Association has found.

Ignore Suggestions

The payrolls were not padded by accident. County officials and politicians have long regarded the boiler rooms in their buildings as ideal places to assign favored political workers in rewarding government jobs. The average yearly salary of a county heating plant employe is \$12,775, as compared with \$10,178 for similar employes in the federal government.

The officials have consistent-

► Task Force Report

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

ly turned a deaf ear to studies and suggestions which would have saved more than a million dollars a year by scrapping useless patronage positions on the heating plant staffs.

An examination of the staffs revealed that 136 jobs could be slashed from the payroll at a savings of \$1,638,382. Following is a breakdown of what those extra 136 jobs are costing the taxpayer:

Cook County Hospital Complex—\$913,850, 75 jobs
Oak Forest Hospital — \$286,787, 27 jobs

Jail and Criminal Courts Complex—\$197,419, 14 jobs
County Building—\$167,261, 13 jobs
Audy Children's Home—\$73,065, 7 jobs
Total—\$1,638,382, 136 jobs

Waste is \$8 Million

That amount is part of the \$5.5 million which the county is squandering on overstaffing of union tradesmen and building operation and maintenance workers, as disclosed in Tuesday's report of the Task Force

series on fiscal mismanagement in county government.

When added to the \$2.5 million in inflated salaries paid blue collar workers, the total waste in this area of county government is \$8 million. This is the equivalent of the yearly tax payments of 13,000 average property taxpayers.

Searching for Funds

The Cook County Health and Hospitals Governing Commission is searching for funds to provide the adequate medical care desperately needed by its low income patients. The commission could find \$913,850 of the money it needs by looking in its boiler room.

There the commission would discover 82 operating engineers and mechanical assistants drawing total annual salaries of \$999,113 to heat the 2,424,494

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County Heating Jobs Waste \$1.6 Million a Year

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square feet of the hospital complex.

In contrast, Hines Veterans hospital, with a similar steam heating plant, employs only six engineers and an apprentice at yearly salaries of \$75,481 to heat its 1,643,128 square feet.

Altho Hines has less area than County Hospital, experts in building operations say that the type of heating equipment, rather than square footage, determines the size of a heating plant staff.

Thus, if County Hospital employed the same number of workers as Hines, but still paid them the county scale, 75 jobs could be eliminated at a savings of \$913,850.

Moreover, the hospital's ancient, worn heating plant and its entire staff could be scrapped if the governing commission implemented a plan that would provide the hospital complex with heat from the modern, efficient plant in the adjoining University of Illinois Medical Center.

The university's heating plant, termed the largest plant of its kind in the Chicago area, supplies heat for the medical center and many other buildings in the area, for a total of about 10 million square feet of buildings. It is staffed with 29 men receiving wages totaling \$367,745 a year.

Reporter, Analyst Help

The plan was conceived by a Task Force reporter and Charles Neubauer a B. G. A. budget analyst, who noted that the pipelines of the university plant run parallel to the County Hospital's underground lines. Details were drawn up by Frank Houck, physical plant director for the medical center.

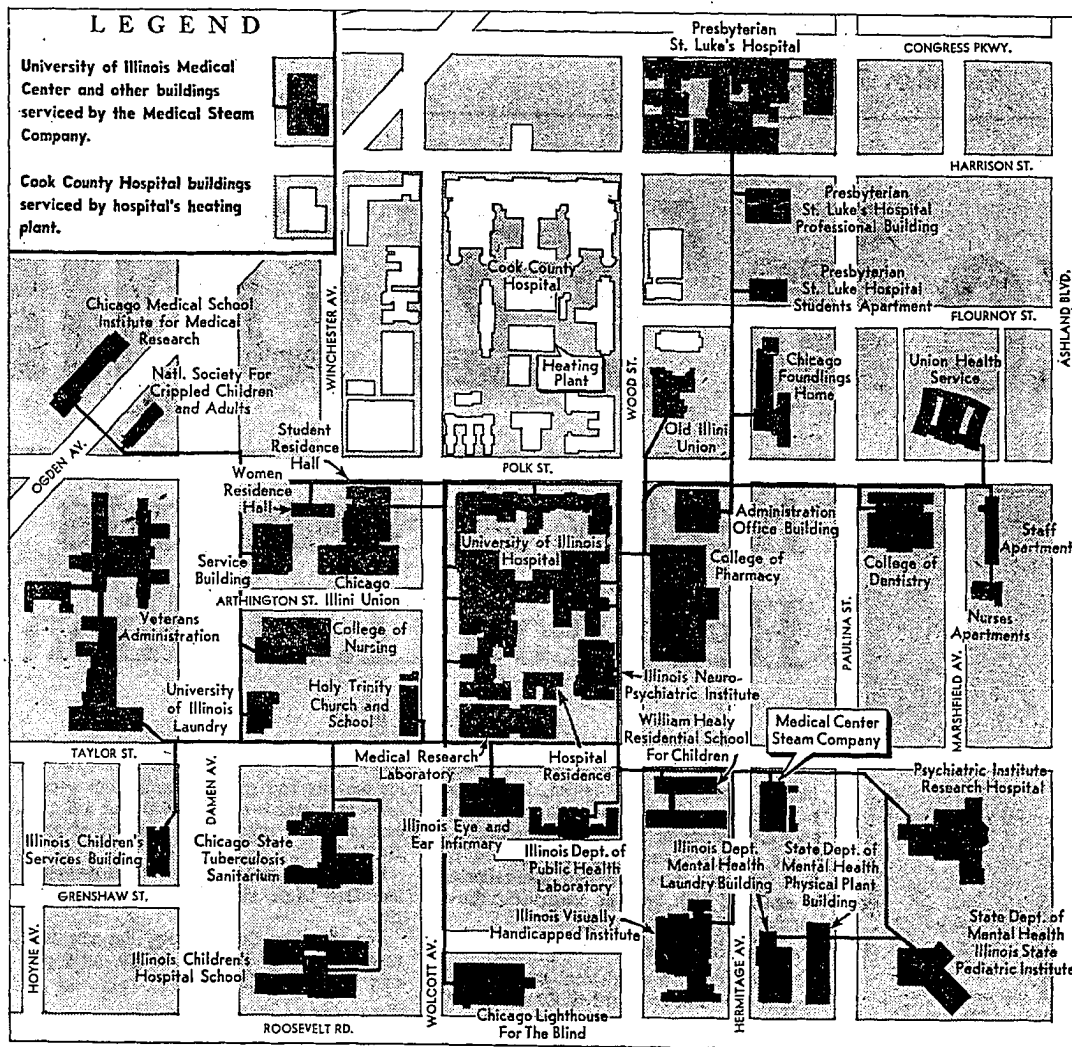
According to Houck, the university plant could pipe steam heat into the hospital by adding two boilers at an installation cost of between \$2 million and \$3 million, plus \$250,000 to change the pressure settings on the turbines in the hospital.

After the installations were made, Houck said, the medical center could begin providing heat for the complex at an annual cost to the county of \$300,000.

Reject Plan

Because County Hospital already spends \$250,000 a year on fuel, in addition to its heating staff salaries, the plan would result in savings of almost \$1 million a year by eliminating 82 heating plant employees.

County Hospital officials admitted the plan was both feasi-



Sprawling University of Illinois medical complex is heated from a single building, with staff of 29 men receiving wages totaling

\$367,745 a year. County Hospital complex, one fifth as large, has heating plant employing 82 men at salaries totaling \$1 million annually.

(TRIBUNE Staff Map by Ray Shlemm)

ble and economical, but rejected it for these reasons:

- The heating plant workers had powerful political backing and political organizations in the county have historically opposed scuttling prime patronage jobs.

- Altho the system would save money, the trade unions would object to it because it would result in fewer jobs.

"What you are really talking about is a union problem," said one official. "You can design a heating system to lessen the number of employees, but the unions will oppose it and that's that."

Oak Forest Plagued

Oak Forest Hospital, which provides health and custodial care to the county's low income aged, is also under the jurisdiction of the governing

commission. Like County Hospital, it, too, is plagued by financially draining mismanagement.

To heat Oak Forest's 1.1 million square feet, the commission pays 47 heating plant workers salaries totaling \$543,406. In comparison, Elgin State Hospital with 1,579,972 square feet and similar heating equipment, employs only 20 workers earning \$256,620 a year.

If the same number of workers were employed at Oak Forest, 27 jobs and \$286,787 could be slashed from the payroll.

Flagrant Example

The most flagrant example of the lengths county officials will go to keep patronage workers on the payroll exists in the 600,000-square-foot County Building.

It is also an illustration of

how officials ignore opportunities to save the taxpayers' money.

In October, 1969, the county agreed to dismantle the heating plant in the County Building and pay the Public Building Commission, which operates the Civic Center, \$186,000 to pipe in steam heat from the Civic Center plant.

Nevertheless, the County Building continues to pay 13 heating plant employees yearly salaries of \$167,261.

Courts Building, Too

The same situation exists in the Criminal Courts and County Jail Building Complex at 26th Street and California Avenue. Several years ago county officials approved a plan to pay city government \$600,000 a year to pipe in low and high pressure steam to the complex

from the nearby city heating plant.

Despite that arrangement, the county still pays \$282,682 to 20 heating plant workers in the Criminal Court and County Jail Buildings, neither of which has any boilers.

When asked to explain why county buildings without heating plants are staffed with heating plant workers, John Galvin, assistant county superintendent of maintenance, said that a city law requires engineers to be present if a building has high pressure steam, whether it is piped into or generated in the building.

According to a city building department official, the law states that an operating engineer must be present in the county building and the Criminal Courts-County Jail Complex because the steam is piped in thru intermediary stations.

14 Jobs at Stake

However, a total of 33 engineers are employed in those structures. Allowing that the county courts-jail complex needs as many engineers as Hines—seven—then 14 jobs could be scrapped there, saving the taxpayer \$197,419.

The entire 13-man County Building staff could be eliminated at a savings of \$167,261 because an operating engineer employed by the adjoining Civic Center could monitor the intermediate stations.

This is the method used at the College of Nursing building in the University of Illinois Medical Center, according to

Houck. He said that operating engineers are not permanently assigned to the building because they are not needed.

Interprets Ordinance

Houck interprets the city ordinance differently than the county officials. He said the law requires a licensed engineer in buildings where high pressure steam is generated by the building's own heating plant.

At the University of Illinois Circle campus, directly east of the university medical center, high pressure equipment was replaced with low pressure units in older buildings to save the expense of retraining operating engineers, Houck said.

"We have an engineer drop in there on a part time basis, but you certainly don't need to staff a building without a heating plant," Houck said.

Most Expensive

The Audy Home for Children, 2240 W. Roosevelt Rd., is the most expensive building, in terms of square footage, to heat in the county.

With an area of 181,000 square feet, the Audy Home employs a steam heating staff of 12—seven engineers and five firemen—at salaries totaling \$158,328 a year.

A startling contrast is offered by the Pentagon, the world's largest office building with more than 6 million square feet, which spends only \$400,000 on its heating plant staff. Moreover, the Pentagon is heated with a coal fuel plant, which requires more people to operate than a steam plant.

The Audy Home also pays twice the wages the federal government pays to its heating workers at Hines Hospital.

Seven Could Go

Applying Hines' standards, the Task Force-B. G. A. investigation concluded that seven employees could be removed from the Audy Home payroll, saving the county's property owners another \$73,065 in taxes.

County officials, when asked why heating plants were so grossly overstaffed, could offer only this startling explanation:

"It takes many more men for our assignments because of all the fringe benefits our employees have," said Robert Schaefer, county superintendent of buildings and grounds. "They have all those days off, like 11 holidays, 12 annual sick leaves, and three to five weeks of vacation."

Needs More Workers

Because so many workers are off on leaves, holidays, and vacations, additional workers are needed to fill in for them, he said.

Saul Carb, County Hospital administrator, agreed with Schaefer.

"Yes, we must have more people because our men have more fringe benefits," Carb said.

However, local government officials over the years have stubbornly insisted that their workers should receive high union wages because they enjoyed fewer fringe benefits than granted to union workers in private industry.

Tomorrow: Wastes in election expenses.