

# Bare Bungling by Civil Defense Commission

It took only 60 seconds for the Cook County Board to approve without comment the \$97,134 Civil Defense Commission budget during hearings last month.

Altho the agency was formed to create a countywide plan to deal with natural or nuclear disasters, its operations are in such disarray that during an interview Director Patrick O'Block could not explain the activities of his own staff.

## Could Have Learned

And if the County Board had taken the time to ask, it would have learned these and other details of a county agency whose main task appears to be providing patronage jobs:

- The Civil Defense commission has failed to certify civil defense plans of even one of the 126 municipalities in Cook County, even tho dozens have

## Task Force Report

Another report by THE TRIBUNE and Better Government Association 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.

asked and, at times, pleaded for help.

- Thirty-two out of 89 suburban civil defense directors interviewed by TRIBUNE Task Force reporters and Better Government Association inves-

tigators have had no contact with the commission. Four out of every five directors polled described their contact as minimal.

- The entire operating budget pays the salaries of seven patronage employes, including O'Block, Thornton Township Democratic committeeman, even tho O'Block admits that all of the agency's programs owe their success to volunteers.

- The agency has no 24-hour communications operation or even an answering service for emergencies. Its communications network is operated sporadically by a volunteer in the basement of his suburban home. And tho O'Block claims the volunteer runs regular weekly checks to the 75 suburbs, no check is made if a community fails to respond.

- The commission's natural

disaster manual is a two-year-old publication, now outdated. O'Block maintains the agency is without funds to update the pamphlet, but he spent nearly \$1,000 in traveling expenses for a 10-day trip to California to take slides of earthquake damage there.

## Must Ask Aid

The commission is supposed to serve in an advisory capacity to all 126 suburban municipalities. It also is required to handle all paperwork in connection with obtaining state accreditation and federal funding for civil defense programs in the 31 communities with populations under 5,000 and in the unincorporated areas.

But their performance has been so poor that the state's representative in Cook County, John Fascia, assisted by one secretary, has often been

[Continued on page 2, col. 1]

COOK COUNTY CIVIL DEFENSE  
*Commission*

GEORGE W. BLISS, DIRECTOR



[TRIBUNE Staff Photo]

Patrick M. O'Block, director of county Civil Defense Commission, in his Civic Center office.

# Find Burocratic Bungling Rampant in County Civil Defense Commission

[Continued from first page]

drafted to assist the county in addition to his own responsibilities to the larger suburbs. Fascia has guided more than 30 suburbs with populations over 5,000 thru the complicated accreditation procedure while the seven county employes have been unable to steer even one suburb thru the process.

Kenilworth is the only accredited community under the county's jurisdiction, but it obtained its recognition only after the state stepped in to rescue its program from a series of county blunders. Edward Eggert, Kenilworth's civil defense director, has written off the commission as an agency of burocratic bunglers.

"I want nothing to do with them," Eggert said in a recent interview. He explained that the commission lost Kenilworth's original accreditation papers. He then went thru the time-consuming task of filling out new applications. The county lost those, too.

## Utterly Frustrated

Utterly frustrated with the county's carelessness, Eggert sought state intervention and finally obtained his accreditation with Fascia's help. He recently bypassed the county agency again and sought Fascia's assistance in applying for a federal grant.

Worth Township's struggle with the commission began two years ago, when a township representative called the county's downtown office to ask for accreditation forms. He was told to wait because new forms were soon to come out. A year elapsed with no further word from the county, and the representative went to the commission office for advice.

"They kept putting me off," he said. "Every time I went down there someone promised to do something and no one ever did."

## Asks State to Intercede

Desperate for some assistance, he asked the state to intercede. County Coordinator William Hackett was finally dispatched to help the township. Hackett spent 30 minutes explaining how to fill out the accreditation forms, the township representative recalled. His instructions were followed, but the forms were rejected because they were filled out improperly.

Again the state interceded, and the accreditation was obtained in a few days without a further hitch.

But Worth Township had no problem getting a county employe to come to its village hall last month. All three county coordinators appeared one evening to show slides of earthquake damage in California.

The slides were taken by O'Block during a 10-day expedition to the disaster site last summer. His \$930.08 in travel expenses was paid by the county, even tho the Cook County area may experience no more than a mild tremor once very 20 years.

An international wire service spokesman said his office could have provided the county with all the professional pictures of the damage the county wanted for under \$50.

At least some of the charges of bungling and inefficiency leveled by community civil defense directors are confirmed by the work sheets in O'Block's office.

## Entries Vague

O'Block claims to demand daily reports from his three coordinators on their activities each week, but could produce none for one employe, Richard Munnizo; and Hackett's file was missing for 105 out of 195 working days. The third coordinator, Ben Ellis, was hired in May, but has no report sheets for the months of July and August.

And the entries recorded by the men consist of such vague items as "general field duties" for one day and "attended a luncheon meeting" for another. In many cases their entries are flatly contradicted by suburban civil defense directors.

Hackett reports having had a meeting with Bartlett's civil defense director, Kenneth Lloyd, on Aug. 3 and with the

pers were received in a few days with Fascia's help.

Perhaps the best explanation for the commission's failures lies in the admissions of employes that they had no civil defense background before taking their jobs. They claim to have taken home study courses to prepare for their work, but records show none completed the course.

"These people were hired for their political background," O'Block explained. "They can acquire a background in civil defense."

The director's only civil defense experience before his first appointment as head of the commission in 1963 was naming another man civil defense director in Hazel Crest, where he was mayor. O'Block lost the county post in 1966, after the Republicans won the County Board presidency, and regained it in 1969, when the Democrats regained the presidency. His salary now is \$19,140.

Like O'Block, the commission's \$12,468-a-year deputy director, Frank Nimietz, a 43d Ward Democratic precinct captain, has been on and off the agency's payroll as county political leadership has seasawed between the two parties.

## Has Ins and Outs

Nimietz was a coordinator for the city's cleanup campaign before his ward committeeman got him on the civil defense payroll in 1959, he said. During the Republican administration, he worked for the county clerk, returning to civil defense in 1969.

Nimietz supervises the coordinators on assignments, addresses civic groups, and replaces O'Block when the director is absent, O'Block said.

The three coordinators are all Democratic precinct captains, said O'Block. Hackett and Ellis are long-time political patronage employes, who served a total of 18 years as Circuit court clerks before joining civil defense.

## Recalls Promotion

Ellis recalls his promotion from court clerk to civil defense coordinator last May: "They told me there was an opening down here and asked if I wanted to come. . . I was interested in civil defense."

Asked what kindled his interest in the field, Ellis responded: "Seymour Simon, my ward committeeman, told me to . . . and it was a bigger salary."

Richard Munnizo became a coordinator two years ago, but declined to discuss how he got the job. He denies O'Block's description of him as an 11th Ward precinct captain, claiming his brother, Edward, a Chicago Park District employe, holds the post.

The two brothers run a family real estate firm at 302 W. 31st St. Munnizo said he works at the firm on weekends and after County quitting time. However, a reporter found him at the office at 2:45 p.m. one weekday and feigned interest in some income property.

## Grows Leery

Apparently suspicious of the reporter, Munnizo volunteered that he was actually working for the county and was on his lunch hour, but then ushered the reporter to a back room for a 20-minute discussion of the real estate picture in the area. He promised to telephone

the reporter if any prospects came up.

Perhaps the most incredible appointment was O'Block's hiring of Mrs. Shirley Petrish, a Thornton Township committeewoman, as an \$817-a-month educator. She candidly admits her ignorance in civil defense.

O'Block represented to the county personnel department that Mrs. Petrish was "qualified" for the job when she was hired a year ago, but told reporters she has actually been performing secretarial duties while she learns the field. As an educator, she earns \$138 a month more than the highest paid county secretary.

## "Getting the Idea"

Mrs. Petrish said she has just recently begun giving some lectures. "After a while, you start getting the idea," she said.

The agency's reputation as a political dumping ground has embittered some suburban civil defense directors who find that the patronage employes offer them no assistance. "In a small community like ours, civil defense and politics don't mix," said a north suburban official.

Politics aside, one of the county's own volunteers, Elmwood Park Fire Lt. Ossie Hjellum, the commission's deputy director of radiological monitoring, concedes: "There is not much for the county civil defense people to do. Most of it is done by the state or local municipalities."

Hjellum's task as deputy director amounts to advising people on where to take radiological monitoring courses, information he obtains from Fascia and then passes on. He was surprised to learn from a reporter that he has a co-deputy director, Marvin Izaacson, who teaches such courses. The two men had never heard of each other, tho they work for the same department.

Izaacson, treasurer of the Thornton Township Democratic organization, was ordered by the federal government to pay back \$427.30 mileage expenses last March—after an investigation disclosed he claimed the money for trips he never made in connection with teaching courses. He is also a \$541-a-month sheriff's process server and operates an Indiana beauty shop.

O'Block ultimately defends the agency by saying, "We can't be eliminated, because the law requires that we exist."

J. Terrence Brunner, executive director of the B. G. A., condemned the commission as an utter waste of taxpayers' money and suggested the county replace the seven employes "with one well qualified man. Based on this agency's performance to date, Mr. O'Block is not that man," Brunner said.

Tomorrow: Heating Cook County buildings — how millions of dollars go up in smoke.

Norridge civil defense director, W. R. McGowen, on Oct. 12. Both men told a reporter they have never been contacted by the county.

Hackett claims to have met March 26 with Melrose Park's civil defense director, Gerald Cossident, but at that time Cossident was recuperating from a severe heart attack and not receiving visitors.

Ellis claims to have met with the Wilmette and Winnetka civil defense directors in May and October, but the directors had no recollection of the sessions.

## "Would Be Fired"

"I can assure you that none of my employes slough off on the job," said O'Block. "If they did, they would be fired."

He claims his staff personally meets or talks with civil defense directors in communities under 5,000 every 60 days and at least once a year in the larger suburbs. No community is contacted by mail only, he said.

However, 32 out of 89 suburban directors told investigators they had absolutely no contact with the commission. Eighteen said their contact was by mail only, 22 described their relationship as minimal, and only 18 reported regular contact.

## Waiting 7 Months

Directors in seven communities with populations under 5,000 said they have never seen or heard from the county, two said their contact was minimal, and six said their contact was by mail only. Only seven reported a satisfactory relationship.

One of those reporting minimal contact was Rosemont's civil defense director, who has been waiting seven months for accreditation forms Hackett has twice promised to send.

Another is the Stone Park civil defense director, Robert Ruge, who went as far as filing a formal complaint with the state, charging commission employes had been "abusive" to his wife and had ignored dozens of telephone calls for assistance over an eight-month period.

## Employes Explain It

One of the last calls he made was to O'Block in the director's home. O'Block promised to send Hackett to the suburb immediately, but Hackett never came, Ruge said. Within days after the state received Ruge's complaint, Fascia was sent to assist—again for a suburb that was technically the county's responsibility. The pa-