

Millions Wasted by County

Task Force, B.G.A. Find 'Mound of Mismanagement'

For the last several weeks, the Cook County Board of Commissioners has been on a \$10.5 million treasure hunt, and all its maps have led to the pockets of the taxpayers.

The commissioners have been led to the wrong place. The treasure is buried in their own backyard, under a mound of mismanagement, bureaucracy, and payrolls that do not produce a return on the taxpayers' investment.

The job of unearthing the \$10.5 million has already been completed for the Board. In a three-month investigation, the Tribune Task Force, working in cooperation with the Better Government Association, found \$14,228,000 in waste in county government.

How it Breaks Down

Following is an accounting of over-expenditures found in a study of only seven facets of county government. These facets account for appropriations of \$38 million, a small fraction of the 1972 operating budgets of \$256 million for the County Board and County Hospitals Governing Commission:

Heating, maintenance, and operation of buildings	\$ 8,000,000
County Highway Department	3,750,000
County Building remodeling project	1,000,000
Laundry services	600,000
Election expenses	500,000
Board of Commissioners	300,000
Civil Defense Department	78,000

Total \$14,228,000

That figure amounts to about 37 per cent of the total appropriations for those facets examined. The commissioners have not looked in that hoard of mis-spent money and consequently they might have to increase 1972 property taxes [payable in the spring of 1973] to produce the \$10.5 million, which is the county's cost of collecting 1971 real estate taxes.

In other words, because of government squandering, the county's citizens may be charged higher taxes to pay the cost of collecting those taxes.

3 New Taxes Added

The County Board has claimed that it is exploring every avenue to avert that course. It has already passed a new automobile excise tax, a mobile home tax, and a tax on vehicles registered in unincorporated areas. Altho the commissioners do not yet know how much revenue those measures will produce, they admit that it will be considerably less than what they need.

Paying for the remainder could result in a 1972 tax rate as high as 50 cents per \$100 of assessed property valuation. The currently planned rate is 45 cents.

This threat comes at a time when taxes are at a record high and the board president himself, George W. Dunne, has warned that "real estate taxes in Cook County have long since reached their saturation point."

The Culprit Is Patronage

The treasure of waste that is buried in the county budget every year is one of the reasons taxes have reached that point. In some cases, the squandering has resulted from inefficiency. In most cases, tho, county officials have established policies that deliberately subvert economy in government by placing politics above frugality.

Patronage is the policy chiefly responsible for making waste an integral part of the budget. County government burgeons with useless positions and with departments that were created just so the politicians could reward the politically faithful with government jobs.

The Task Force—B. G. A. investigation revealed that the county's one million taxpayers are paying for bricklayers who don't lay bricks, plumbers who seldom touch a wrench, and heating engineers who don't operate heating plants. These are but a few examples:

- County taxes pay 13 employes combined salaries of \$167,000 a year to operate a plant that no longer exists.
- A county-operated building of 180,000

The Cook County government faces a budget crisis. The only solution it offers is to turn to the taxpayer. There is another solution and that is efficient government. THE TRIBUNE Task Force and the Better Government Association in a three-month investigation have found gross mismanagement of money in the county government. This is the first in a series of articles. It was compiled and written by Task Force director George Bliss and reporters Philip Caputo, William Currie, William Jones, and Pamela Zekman.

Task Force Report

square feet employs 12 workers at \$150,000 a year to operate its heating plant.

In contrast, the Pentagon, with 6 million square feet—33 times more space—pays only 2½ times as much for its heating plant staff.

● The County Highway Department spends \$5.7 million, or \$9,800 a mile, to maintain 580 miles of road. A remarkably similar county acclaimed for its efficient program, spends \$5.3 million, or \$1,900 a mile, to maintain 2,700 miles of road.

● One county department apparently exists only to provide jobs for Democratic ward and township workers, several of whom were found to be filing false work records. This department has functioned so badly that a state agency has been forced to take over its operations.

● A division of the county clerk's office is wasting an estimated half million dollars a year in padded payrolls and inflated storage and moving contracts.

● The county's 1,632 blue collar workers are earning salaries totaling about \$15 million a year, a figure that would be \$2.5 million less if they were paid on the same scale as tradesmen and laborers employed by the federal government.

Too Much for Too Little

In a phrase, Cook County government is a government of too many employes being paid too much to do too little.

An illustration of that fact is offered by the County Department of Rabies Control. Altho it is a small department funded by fees rather than taxes, it is a microcosm of the patronage, payroll cheating, and wastefulness that are rampant thruout county government.

It is also an example of the lengths to which bureaucracy can be extended, because the department has spent an increasing amount of money each year to control a problem that has not existed for 15 years. The last reported case of dog rabies in the county occurred in 1954, and yet the department's budget has increased \$257,000 in 10 years, from \$94,000 to \$351,000.

Runs an Animal Hospital

The department obtains its revenue from the \$1 vaccination tag fees charged to suburban Cook County's 300,000 pet owners, many of whom are property taxpayers supporting waste in other government agencies.

Dr. Robert P. Litt, chief rabies in-

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Millions in Tax Money Wasted by County Government

(Continued from first page)

spector, explained that the growth of the budget was caused by cost-of-living increases and salary raises for his 27 employees. He is paid \$29,058 a year. If the work habits of Litt and his two top supervisors are any indication, the department is not giving the citizens of the county a return on their investment.

Litt spends half of his working hours in the animal hospital he owns at 8449 S. South Chicago Av.

Martin Brin, who is paid \$13,716 a year as supervisor of rabies inspectors, spends his time selling beer for a West Side distributor. Clarence Jacobson, a \$13,000-a-year citations officer, was employed until recently full time by the Flexi-Mat Corp., 1440 W. 21st Pl.

By his own admission, Litt spends only six hours a day on county business, even tho his position is budgeted as full time. He said that he generally begins work at 10:30 a. m. and leaves by 4:30 p. m.

Not Always True

This is not true of every day, because on Oct. 12, a Task Force reporter and B. G. A. investigator observed Litt treating pets in his hospital at 11 a. m. He was also seen engaged in his private practice during the mornings of Wednesday, Oct. 20, and Friday, Oct. 22.

On the latter date, a reporter phoned the Rabies Control Department and learned that Litt would not be in on county business for the entire day and was not expected to return until after 12:30 p. m. on the next working day.

Nevertheless, Litt justifies his executive-rank salary by citing his professional standing as a veterinarian and his expertise in rabies control.

"Thirty thousand dollars a year is not a lot of money for a professional man," he said. "I'm a professional man with a respected position in the veterinary association."

Brin is on the payroll to supervise the eight deputy rabies inspectors who make door-to-door checks thruout suburban Cook County to determine if dog owners have vaccinated their pets against rabies. He also receives a monthly auto allowance of \$100 because his job is supposed to carry him from one end of the county to the other.

Uses Car to Sell Beer

Brin does use his auto, but not to supervise inspectors. Instead, he drives around the North and West Sides selling beer for American Beverages Co., a distributorship at 2555 W. Armitage Av.

The morning of Oct. 19 was a typical one for the veteran payroller. William Recktenwald, chief investigator for the B. G. A., observed him leave his Lincolnwood home at 8 a. m., and arrive at the distributorship at 8:45 a. m. After spending the morning on company business, Brin returned home for lunch at 11:30 a. m. and remained there for about an hour.

Brin appears immune to the sanctions against working another job on county time. In 1961, Daniel Ryan, then County Board president, refused to fire Brin after Brin admitted he was working as a beer salesman while receiving \$5,100 a year as a rabies inspector. His admission came as he was testifying at a hearing investigating charges that mob chieftain Anthony Accardo was working as a salesman for the same firm, Premium Sales, Inc.

Jacobson is another payroller who enjoyed the benefits of a dual income while working only one job. Altho he was drawing more than \$13,000 a year to issue citations against dog owners who have failed to vaccinate their pets, he was found on several occasions at Flexi-Mat, a manufacturer of rubber pillows.

Found Working Elsewhere

Investigators observed him there during parts of the morning and afternoon of Oct. 14. On Oct. 20, a reporter followed Jacobson from his home at 6118 N. Rockwell St. to the company, where he remained until early afternoon. Subsequent calls to Flexi-Mat revealed that he was a regular employe with the firm.

The double income and \$75 in monthly auto allowances allowed Jacobson to live well. He maintains a large apartment, a maid, and owns two expensive automobiles, a late model Buick and a new white Cadillac.

Litt said that a department employe who holds a full time job during county working hours would be fired. He then made this ironic observation:

"If one of our employes was doing that, I would call him on the carpet and tell him he was thru. Or Mr. Brin would. Brin keeps these guys in line."

He explained that he could fire them on the spot because none of his employes are under civil service.

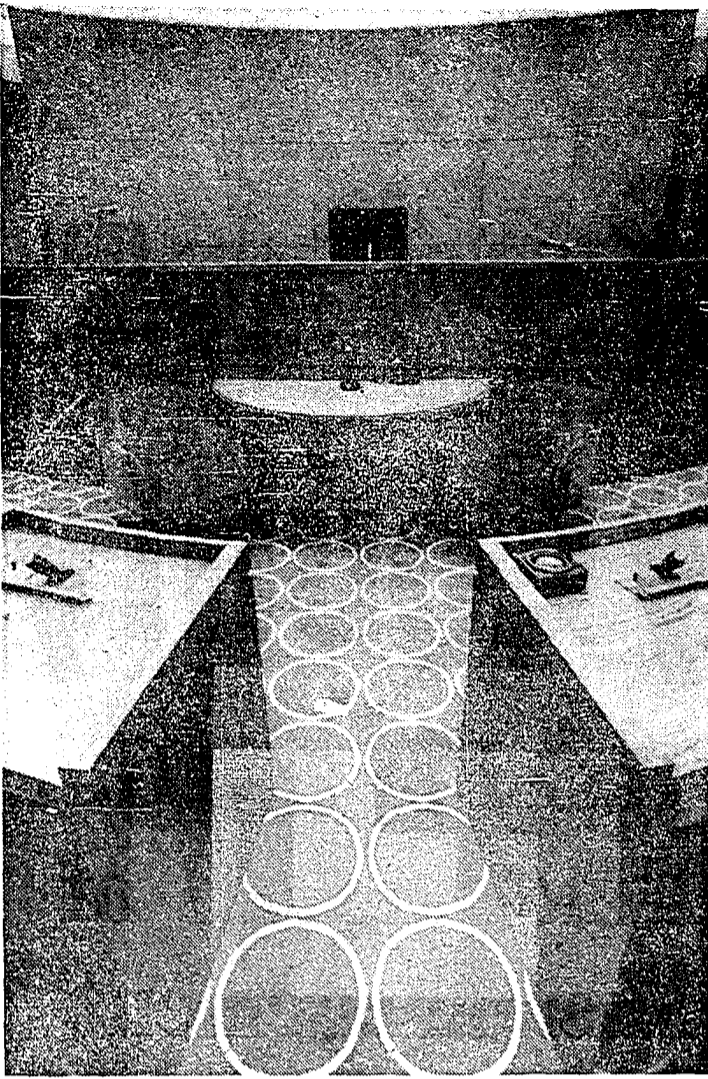
All Politically Sponsored

All are politically-sponsored patronage workers who had to present letters from their ward or township committeemen before they could be put on the payroll.

"This is the way our system works," said Litt.

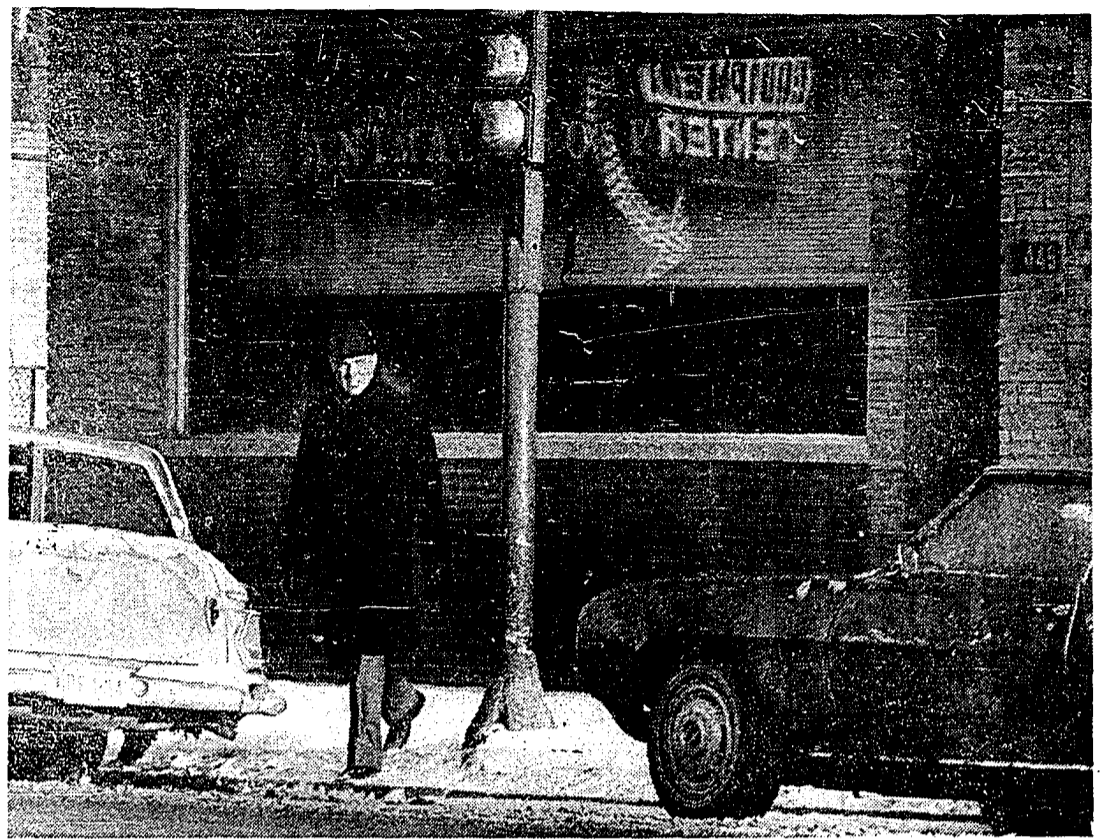
J. Terrence Brunner, executive director of the B. G. A., called for the removal of all three men.

"I think Dr. Litt should be fired,"



(TRIBUNE Staff Photo)

Red velvet chairs and carpeting for county commissioners. Chairs cost \$236 each and the carpeting was \$4,400.



(TRIBUNE Staff Photo: By Jack Mulcahy)

Dr. Robert P. Litt outside the Little Animal Hospital, 8449 South Chicago Av., at 9 a. m. on Jan. 5. Dr. Litt is paid \$29,058 a year as chief rabies inspector for Cook County. Tribune investigators discovered he spends several hours each day treating pets at his private hospital while on county time. Dr. Litt heads a staff of 27.

Brunner said. "The taxpayers are paying him for full time, but he only works half the time. I don't see why the citizens of the county should be running tag days for Dr. Litt. Brin and Jacobson should be fired and not replaced. The department has been functioning without them all along."

Above that, Brunner suggested that tens of thousands of dollars could be saved if each suburban municipality assumed its own rabies control function, leaving the county responsible only for unincorporated areas, which cover about 250 of the county's 956 square miles.

Such Reforms Not Likely

But if the County Board follows previous patterns, such reforms are not likely. The Board has continually resisted money-saving recommendations that would deplete the ranks of its patronage army. This is evidenced by the fact that 8,410 of the county's 14,846 jobholders are patronage employes.

Conversely, only 6,436, or 43 per cent, are under civil service, even tho the civil service laws have been in effect since 1895.

The overriding importance of patronage came to light recently, when the Task Force obtained a previously unpublished study which outlined a plan that would have saved the taxpayers \$1 million a year. The study, compiled by a private firm, recommended the removal of 76 jobs from the city and county's heating plant staff. According to one official, the plan was vetoed by the County Board, which feared the loss of that many politically sponsored jobs.

Economy again took a backseat to politics when one county department was not permitted to contract with a private firm to service its laundry until the

patronage workers in the laundry were given other jobs on the department's already overstaffed payroll.

Pattern Set at the Top

If there is one root cause of the County Board's resistance to budget-tightening innovations it is this: The Board itself is a repository of patronage, a glaring example of overstaffing and overspending. Having recently rewarded themselves with a \$5,000 pay raise, each of the 15 commissioners is paid \$20,000 a year, despite the fact that 13 spend most of their time working in other jobs in private industry.

In addition, each commissioner is attended by a small but high-priced retinue of politically sponsored aides, who also spend several hours a day on political and private ventures, rather than on their county duties.

If the Board reduced either its staff or its salaries to conform with the amount of work that is done, a savings of \$300,000 could be realized.

In November, Board President Dunne said this to the commissioners:

"... the cost of government will go down only when all of us have learned to exercise self-discipline in every facet of our daily lives... I mean this to be an appeal to everyone to exercise the necessary restraints. If we do not, we might very well bring about the collapse of our democratic institutions as a result of steadily increased cost of government beyond our capability to pay."

Dunne said that in a room that is a monument to self-indulgence. It is the County Board room, where the commissioners went on a spending spree during the current remodeling project of the County Building.

The commissioners showed little self-

restraint when they ordered the room furnished with velvet drapes, sculptured wood desks, lush carpeting, tortoise shell ashtrays, and brass-trimmed wastebaskets, costing more than \$58,000, or the equivalent of the real estate taxes paid by 100 average home owners.

And whenever the commissioners meet to discuss where they can find the \$10.5 million treasure, they sit on a small part of it. Each of them has been provided with a \$236 red velvet chair.

Such fiscal intemperance was not confined to the County Board. From the highest official down to the lowliest clerk, county employes considered the remodeling project a license for them to transform their offices into plush showpieces.

Remodeling Running High

Furthermore, the project, born in confusion and nurtured on mismanagement, is now running more than \$1 million more than the cost of the original contracts, which totaled \$5,707,546. As a result of inefficient planning, some of the contracts doubled in cost.

Soaring real estate taxes are not the only consequence of bungling of this magnitude.

"The taxpayer should look at it this way," said Vernon Kron, research director of the Civic Federation, a taxpayers' watchdog agency. "It is not just higher property taxes, but higher utility rates, higher prices in local stores, and higher rents. Utility companies, landlords, and merchants pay property taxes. If you lowered their taxes, they would not have to raise their rates, prices, and rents, and perhaps could lower them."

Tomorrow: How thousands of dollars were wasted on new furnishings in the County Building.