

National Municipal Review

Editorial Comment

Danger! "Democracy" at Work

WHEN things appear to be going fairly well in a community—and even when they don't—it is extremely difficult to persuade people to take a serious interest in public affairs, particularly financial.

Good officials worry about this; venal officials are glad of it.

Many thoughtful civic leaders have decided it is possible only on rare occasions to arouse any considerable proportion of the population to a point of genuine interest and that, even when it can be done, interest can be sustained only briefly. Therefore average conditions become bad, bad conditions become worse, and finally there is a brief revolt to "throw the rascals out."

Citizen groups and officials frequently unite in urging attendance by voters at budget hearings; but the result is almost always disappointing. Either no one comes or the only questions are those raised by representatives of anti-spending organizations or by "gimme" groups.

But, stay! The picture may not be as gloomy as it seems. No less a bulwark of democracy than Jersey City provided an outstanding demonstration recently of an embattled citizenry on the march to do something about that budget. And no wonder, for the Jersey City tax rate even under the old budget was \$52.18.

It was a grim and determined crowd which came early and overflowed the

large, expensively impressive room. Finally the five members of the commission filed in and took their seats. They were headed by "Boss" Hague himself who had come up from Florida for the occasion to do his duty as mayor. He smiled easily, quite confident "his" people would ask no questions about the budget which he would be unable to answer to his own satisfaction.

One man, a young lawyer, arose and asked a question. "Boss" Hague barked at him. The young man barked back. The crowd applauded—Hague. It booed and hissed the young man. Like a college cheering section, the crowd set up the chant, "Pass the budget! Pass the budget!"

So the "hearing" groaned, hissed, booed and shouted on to an uninformative conclusion, and no one knew any more about the mysteries of Jersey City budgets than before. And no one, except the troublesome young lawyer, seemed to want to know.

Could these embattled citizens, who stormed City Hall with fire in their eyes and a determined set of their chins be regimented public employees and their relatives?

The temptation to suspect "Boss" Hague of aping Hitler's methods should be resisted. After all, Hitler has been on the scene for only about ten years. Hague ran Jersey City while Hitler was still painting houses.

The Man Behind the Man Behind the Gun

THERE is much talk nowadays about the necessity of raising a fully equipped, trained army at least seven million strong to wage war abroad. We can certainly draft that number of men for military service. But we can't turn them into an efficient modern army unless "the men behind the men behind the guns" are trained and efficient. And that means that we must now make the civil service what it must be—the basis of military efficiency.

Before the army rates a man as an officer or technical expert, he has to prove that he is qualified for and capable of performing the duties involved. The morale of Private Jones would be shot to bits if he knew his welfare and his life were in the control of a top sergeant who had been given his rank and authority not because of fitness but because he had done campaign work for some political boss.

Private Jones may not realize that some man behind a government desk may be a more decisive factor in his life—or death—than his own top sergeant. This man behind the desk is "the man behind the man behind the gun." He *should* be at that particular task because he has qualified for the responsibilities of that particular position—not because he knew somebody who knew somebody who knew a politician.

To fight this war successfully gov-

ernment as well as labor and industry must go all out for efficiency. That means application of the merit system throughout the army of public employees—federal, state, and local—on which the welfare of our fighting forces depends.

Public appointments based on merit system tests are not merely desirable—they are a *military necessity*.

America's war expenditures will probably reach \$100,000,000 a day before the end of 1942, and the army of public employees—federal, state and local—an all time high of 5,000,000.

To win the war the American people will gladly shoulder the burden of heavy taxes and personal sacrifices. The only stipulation they make—and they have a right to make it—is that their sacrifices shall not be made in vain. They are willing to pay for equipping an army. They are willing to give up personal and business "life as usual" for that purpose—but they want this purpose to be accomplished without hampering red tape, incompetence, patronage waste, and political corruption.

In time of peace, government efficiency is *desirable* because it is economical. In time of war it is *vital* because waste, incompetence, and delay mean not only lost dollars and lost prestige, but lost battles and needlessly sacrificed lives.