

Effect of Popular Prejudices on Public Business.

(Public Policy.)

A Government by the people may be an ideal democracy, but it cannot be an ideal business organization while the people who govern are swayed by popular prejudices rather than reason and the logic of experience. The administration of every public official is paralyzed in the degree to which popular prejudice governs. The cost to the people of this country of inefficient public administration so caused cannot be computed. This is a serious matter and should receive careful attention from every citizen.

When popular prejudice deliberately prefers representation by inexperienced and incompetent men to representation by experienced men, who have demonstrated their ability, the cause of good and efficient government is doomed. Election or appointment to office has no power to confer wisdom upon the ignorant, ability upon the incompetent. The power of prejudice is shown by its effect on the minds of people in causing them to forget this truth when taking political action, while they recognize it in every other selective action of their lives.

When good citizens remain passive and permit popular prejudices to control political action they must expect to have public offices filled by "good fellows," every means by which they earn the title of "good fellow" being a tendency or habit that disqualifies them for efficient public service. This is the soil that generates corruption.

Honor Those in Office.

Another anomaly is found in the seeming incapacity of the people to understand that virtuous indignation energetically expressed against the conduct of incompetent or corrupt men in office is not a full discharge of their civic duty. Where one man in office is deliberately incompetent or viciously corrupt one hundred others are conscientiously endeavoring to discharge the duties of their office intelligently and efficiently. When the press and the people take the course of endeavoring to honor honesty and efficiency in office as ostentatiously and energetically as it now attempts to dishonor dishonesty and inefficiency they will find an effectual remedy for the evils of which they complain. What better encouragement can be given to a public official than the knowledge that a good service record is a good title to office as long

as he wishes to hold it. The need of the people to have an efficient man in office is perpetual. The sure way of satisfying this need is to make it a fixed public policy to appoint every public official who has performed his duties honestly and efficiently. Of all senseless prejudices the one against keeping good men in office is the most devoid of reason. The cry of "rotation in office" has in it no element of common sense.

If we are to have good government we should recognize and encourage the men who give it to us. The forces which favor bad government are highly appreciative and they have good memories. Generous public recognition of good service in public station will be helpful to the men who render it and it cannot fail to exert an influence for good upon all those who may be tempted to play the part of a demagogue.

Be Generous in Honors and in Compensation.

In private employment honest and efficient service is rewarded not only by continuous employment, but by advancement and increased compensation. The absence of this inducement in the administration of public affairs is sufficient to account for a wastage of tax-payers' money, which, in amount, so far exceeds all losses by dishonesty as to make the latter hardly noticeable. One of the illogical arguments urged by advocates of the ownership and operation of public service utilities is that there would be a great saving in the item of salaries for administration. When has it occurred in the history of the efficient management of any business that reasonable payment for good ability was not a good investment?

The cheapest wages and salaries are those that produce a profit. Wages and salaries that produce a loss are never cheap.

This inability of the people to obtain honest, intelligent and efficient service is the natural result of a popular prejudice against public officers and a wrong conception of what is a just compensation for the services they render. Before the people can reasonably expect efficient administration of public business they must adopt a fixed public policy of making a good service record not only a title for re-election or appointment, they must make it a valid voucher for good pay. The people must learn the good economy of being generous in honors and in compensation.

Encouraging Public Officers.

(Chicago Chronicle.)

Men who call themselves good citizens are inclined not only to neglect important public duties but to remain passive when they should be active in the moral support which they owe to good government.

Wherever a public officer appears to be enforcing or interpreting a law without respect to persons, the men who believe in law and order should take measures to let him know that his courage and independence have not been overlooked.

No man in the highest office is insensible to public approval. It is the dread of censure quite as much as the desire to cultivate approbation which produces the demagogue.

We are all inclined to take too much for granted. If one man obviously makes a bid for the labor vote we may say he is inclined that way and probably forget all about it. If another enforces the law justly and without reference to persons we say he has backbone and good sense and we forget all about that, too.

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There is a constant pressure upon many public officers to do wrong. Much of this influence comes from organized sources. Whether it is formidable or not, it has that appearance and it is successful oftener than it should be.

It would be a good idea to create an alert and watchful public opinion for the purpose of exerting a counter pressure in favor of good government, and one of the most important features of the movement should be the encouragement of letters, resolutions and speeches of approval for all who administer the law fairly and fearlessly.