

MAKING EVERY DOLLAR COUNT

By Thomas H. Reed

Editor's note: Following is a partial reprint of an article which appeared in the January, 1948, issue of National Municipal Review. The material was originally presented as a speech by Dr. Reed, municipal consultant, before the National Municipal League in Nashville, Tenn., November 13, 1947. Although Dr. Reed was speaking of city governments, his ideas are equally applicable to state governments.

There is no question but that American cities are going through a period of great financial strain. Their cost of living, like that of the individual, has shot up with frightening velocity. This is due in part to public demand for more and better municipal services and in part to the general fall in the purchasing power of the dollar which is characteristic of this as of previous postwar inflations.

There are two great sources of municipal waste. The first of these leaks can be controlled by long-term planning of improvements so that money is not frittered away on unrelated projects or on those offering only minor advantage to the community; by holding up as far as possible public works in times of high prosperity and high cost, and building up reserves in cash or credit with which they may be undertaken in times of depression and low cost; by business-like methods of contract letting and contract supervision.

The second great source of waste is harder to manage, partly because it is not a matter of a few big leaks but of many little trickles. In their aggregate, however, these little trickles may become a mighty stream. Something

like 80 per cent of all city expenditures, omitting debt service, is for salaries and wages.

This is not a suggestion that the wages of municipal employees should be cut. On the contrary, it is essential that employees be paid not merely a living wage but one commensurate with the wages paid for similar work in private employment. It is neither honorable nor safe for a city to under pay its help. This is a plea, however, for getting a full day's work for a full day's pay and one that is as efficient

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