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By EDWARD G. LOWRY

Author "Washington Close-Up," "Banks and Financial Systems," etc. Contributor Political and Economic Articles to Leading Periodicals and a Writer of Recognized Authority on the National Government's Business Methods.

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IX.

OUT-OF-DATE MACHINE

A committee made up of three members of the senate and three members of the house is now considering the whole problem of the organization of the executive departments of the government with a view to finding out how to reorganize them so as to increase their efficiency and decrease their cost of operation. It is about time. The great executive departments of the government have not been reorganized or greatly modernized since Alexander Hamilton's day.

Representative Reavis of Nebraska is one of the members of this joint congressional committee that is making the present investigation. He put the resolution through the house that brought about the appointment of the committee. He is a part of the national government machine and he ought to know what he is talking about when he says that "while the government of the United States is the world's biggest business, it is likewise the world's worst managed business."

That is an indictment and a statement of fact that will stand the closest scrutiny and the most inspiring analysis. But listen to Mr. Reavis:

"Why should the Interior department run an insane asylum and a college for negroes and a school for the deaf? How did it get that way? Why should one personnel in the pension bureau in the Interior department be caring for the disabled soldiers of the Civil war and the Spanish American war, while another personnel in the bureau of war risk insurance of the treasury is caring for the veterans of the World war? Why this hodgepodge of totally unrelated purposes which is resulting in endless duplication and appalling expense?"

I will let Mr. Reavis go on without further interruption. As a member of the house he has his share of the responsibility for the conditions he describes:

There are 29 separate governmental agencies handling engineering, architectural and public works functions, all of a related kind. There is no good reason why all these agencies should not be consolidated in one department and about 38 of the useless organizations done away with. There are 26 government agencies engaged in surveying and mapping; there are 27 separate and distinct agencies engaged in public building operations; there are 18 agencies authorized to build roads; there are 19 engaged in hydraulic construction; there are 16 doing work on rivers; there are 10 engaged in public land functions; there are 12 doing chemical investigation connected with public work operations; there are 22 doing engineering and research.

Many of these agencies have been inactive for a number of years, but they are keeping up their personnel in anticipation of work in the future. We would save \$20,000,000 a year, in my judgment, by doing away with useless bureaus and duplication of activities.

Some of the duplications are ridiculous and absurd. For instance, the government seeks to protect the wild animals in the national parks. If a brown badger bear has twin cubs, one brown and one black, as often happens, and one should shoot the brown cub he must make his settlement with one department, but if he shoots its full brother, the black cub, he must settle with another department. If you were to shoot a fox in Alaska your settlement would be with the Department of Agriculture, while if you trapped the same fox you must make your settlement with the Department of Commerce.

The government issued last year through its several bureaus and departments 15 cookbooks. The last one that was issued was published by the board of vocational education. This is a board of rehabilitative crippled soldiers of the World war, to prevent, as far as possible, their becoming derelicts in life.

It may be of interest to state that while the government has been issuing 15 cookbooks and consuming vast quantities of print paper in these and similar useless publications, 1,300 country town newspapers have suspended in the last three months because they could not secure print paper.

Mr. Reavis and a great many others have sensed the feeling in the country and in congress that the time has come to put an end to all this sort of thing. He gives reasons for his belief:

One of the reasons is that the people demand that their taxation be reduced. For many years we have been collecting the revenues of this government through systems of indirect taxation. The revenues have been collected through a protective tariff and by excise taxation on intoxicating liquors. Indirect taxation of this kind prevents the people from realizing fully just who is paying the expenses of the government. There was a time when the expenses of the government amounted to only 12 cents per capita per year. Today the annual per capita expense exceeds \$6. This tremendous expense has made it necessary to resort to direct taxation, and the people have suddenly become painfully aware of who pays the expenses of the government.

I am very certain that the elimination of duplications and overlapping in the departments will result in the saving of millions of dollars. There is no reason why it should not be done.

There is every reason, in the presence of the strife and turmoil that prevail in this country and of the urgent necessities of life, by the high cost of the necessities of life, that the government should be put upon a sane, efficient and economical basis.

Whoever by public clamor or other means can induce congress and the executive departments to organize the routine business of the national government will have performed a great public service. Note that I say "organize" and not "reorganize," for in no proper sense has the federal business ever been organized.

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