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More Authority for Local Governments

THE Institute of Government, we learn from The Cleveland Star, has interested itself in behalf of restoration to local governments of some measure of the authority which they have lost to the state in the centralization trend of recent years. Reporting a meeting of the institute in Raleigh last week, The Star said:

"A new machinery act has been devised and will be submitted to the legislature for action. It changes the personnel of the state board of assessment by specifying that three members shall be tax supervisors. x x x

"Another recommendation is that the date of tax listing be changed from April 1 to January 1. Still another is one giving county commissioners power to make horizontal changes in tax assessments and to set up a permanent tax listing system. The section controlling tax listers' pay has been repealed, and that would be left up to the county.

"It is recommended that the tax supervisor be allowed to require the balance sheet of any corporation and to examine all records.

"A new system to garner more revenue from automobile taxes provides that motorists when applying for licenses must specify the county and the township in which they live and pay taxes. This information would be given to the county tax supervisor.

"Still another recommendation is that the board of equalization be allowed to reduce assessments at any time for reasonable cause."

We are glad to hear that some organized action is to be taken looking toward return to local governments of some of the powers of which they have been relieved; but we hope the Institute of Government will be able to make county officials realize that responsibility goes with authority. It has been one of the writer's pet theories that centralization of government, both in state and nation, has resulted not so much from greed for power on the part of officials higher up as from failure of officials in the lesser units to bear the burdens imposed by their authority.

The counties might still be practically autonomous in the matter of schools and roads, having only a minimum of state supervision and coordination, instead of almost absolute state dictation; but the counties declined or failed to accept the responsibility. They asked the state to foot the bills, and so the state had to take over, not only the expense of maintaining the roads and operating the schools, but also the authority inseparably linked with these responsibilities. The state took little hand in the supervision of county and municipal fiscal matters until the counties, in effect, asked the state to endorse their bonds. Then, of course, the state had to enact the local government laws giving it some control over purely local financial affairs.

Be that as it may, we hope centralization can be stopped before it goes any farther, and that some of the powers already taken over by the state will be returned to local governments. The Institute of Government is approaching the matter from the right angle. Furthermore, the changes it proposes not only should have the effect of increasing local authority, but also should result in a more equitable and more efficient system of taxation.

Scraps of Paper

Judging by President Roosevelt's remarks on his tour of inspection of the Tennessee Valley project, the administration is well satisfied with the progress that has been made and intends to carry to completion this experiment in "planned economy." The president is not a whit discouraged, despite the fact that the coal barons have joined the power potentates in their attack on the TVA. A certain amount of "rugged opposition," commented the chief executive, was to be expected; but that "is fading as the weeks and months go by." In view of this remark, the petitions recently circulated in this section, asking the TVA to stay out, amount to just so much scrap paper. There is little need now to fear any ill consequences from that rashly importunate episode.

Another Movement for Disarmament

—by A. B. Chapin—



THROUGH CAPITAL KEYHOLES

BY BESS HINTON SILVER

LIVELY SCRAP—

You don't hear much about it but a real contest is developing between State Senators Carl L. Bailey, of Washington County, and Paul Grady of Johnston, for president pro tem of the coming Senate session. Both are veterans and have many friends among the new Senate line-up. Both have booming voices and both demonstrated their ability at presiding over the Upper House in 1933. Before either is elected to the post of assistant gavel-rapper members of the Senate will know that a scrap has been taking place.

NEW STATE COUNSEL—

Capitol Hill nose-in-the-wind boys smell a change coming in the Attorney General's office. It cannot be confirmed but there's good reason to believe that one of the three assistants Attorney General is about to retire. Poor health is said to be the reason for the prospective resignation. Keep your ears and eyes open and don't be surprised when you hear the news. A lot of people supposed to be "in the know" whisper that it's coming.

POLLED THE VOTE—

It may not mean anything to you on its face but the fact that Johnston county polled a larger percentage of its June primary vote in the November election than either Nash or Vance counties is taken to have certain political significance in the Fourth Congressional District. You will remember that Congressman Harold D. Cooley, of Nash, defeated Jere Perry Zollcoffer, of Vance, and George Ross Pou, of Johnston for the Democratic nomination last June. Friends of Mr. Pou are pointing to the large Johnston Democratic vote this month as compared with the party's ballots in Nash and Vance counties.

APPROPRIATIONS—

Would-be raiders of the State gasoline tax have adopted a slogan, "As much for schools as for roads" for their legislative campaign to get part of the money paid by auto and truck owners to build and maintain roads. The appropriation for schools now is \$16,000,000 each year while the highway appropriation is \$18,000,000 per year. But more than \$9,000,000 of the highway appropriation goes for

principal and interest payments on bonds while the whole \$16,000,000 goes for operation of the schools. Something like \$6,000,000 debt service for school buildings is being paid by local government units and does not come out of the State appropriation. If included it would run the school expenditures up to about \$22,000,000 per year.

MYSTERY—

It's hard to get any advance idea on the length of the coming legislative session. Some veterans are inclined to think that the 1935 General Assembly already realizes that a State must have money on which to operate but others express the opinion that it will take the constitutional 60 days for so many new members to learn what its all about. Everybody agrees that there is going to be some fight against the sales tax with opinion on the outcome divided. Then there is the question of money for boosts in teacher and state employe pay to say nothing of the necessity for relief funds. It's a knotty problem and your guess is likely to be as good as anybody's.

IN THE SUN—

About two years ago, during the banking crisis, Gurney P. Hood, State Banking Commissioner was right in the spotlight of the news. Then the Roosevelt administration got the situation straightened out and Mr. Hood dropped out of the news. Times have improved and closed banks are now paying dividends almost as rapidly as they were closing in 1933-34. That puts the Banking Commissioner right back in the sun again. Incidentally, the dividends have made Mr. Hood a more popular man than in the days when the banks were closing.

TO PAY OR NOT TO PAY—

The question of immediate payment of the soldiers' bonus is almost certain to arise to plague North Carolina members of Congress during the coming session. President Roosevelt is against it at this time and most of the boys from the Old North State are riding in the same buggy with F. D. R. these days. Senator Josiah William Bailey voted against the bonus last session along with some of the others but times have changed since mother was a girl. State Legion Commander Hubert Olive has come out for cash payment and the North Carolina delegation to the national convention of the Legion at Miami voted solidly with the majority for immediate cashing of the certificates. There doesn't seem to be much opportunity for straddling the fence. It's just every

man's judgment as to whether President Roosevelt or the bonus can swing the most votes in 1936—either that or the voting of honest convictions.

LION'S SHARE—

Western North Carolina Democrats who at first complained that Governor Ehringhaus favored the east with patronage should be feeling better these days. The latest major appointment to go west was the naming of Dr. Carl V. Reynolds, a cousin of Senator "Our Bob," as acting State health officer with every indication that he will be named permanently to that office next spring. He succeeds the late Dr. James M. Parrott, of Kinston. Other juicy plums tossed west by Governor Ehringhaus are a place on the Supreme Court bench given Judge Michael Schenck; director of the prison division presented Jack Roach, of Statesville; Superintendent of Public Instruction tendered Clyde A. Erwin, of Rutherfordton, a couple of seats on the Superior Court bench and a hatful of minor places on boards and commissions.

REVERSE ENGLISH?—

Howls went up to high heaven when Dr. M. C. S. Noble, Jr., was named Executive Assistant to Revenue Commissioner A. J. Maxwell and placed in charge of personnel of the State's collecting agency. There were plenty of predictions that the next Legislature would give the Doctor the well-known boot. Dr. Noble said nothing consistently declining to be quoted. Of recent months revenue reports have been decidedly favorable but still Dr. Noble says nothing. Capitol Hill is beginning to sing a different tune. The ear-to-the-ground boys say off the record that the Doctor will not have to talk before the Legislature except to say, "Howde ye do." They venture prognostications that the records will defend Dr. Noble in the early days of 1935.

HEADGEAR—

North Carolina's victory in securing the park-to-park road to be constructed by the federal government from the Shenandoah National Park to the Great Smoky National Park is a feather in the hats of the State's two Senators, Congressmen Zebulon Weaver and R. L. Doughton and Governor Ehringhaus. But the honors seem to be about equally divided. From this distance at this time it is difficult to figure out how it gives any one of them any great political advantage over the other members of the group. You can make your own deductions.