MIDDLETOWN IN TRANSITION

A Study in Cultural Conflicts

BY

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS vii
PREFACE ix
I. MIDDLETOWN REVISITED 3
II. GETTING A LIVING 7
III. THE X FAMILY: A PATTERN OF BUSINESS-CLASS CONTROL 74
IV. CARING FOR THE UNABLE DURING THE DEPRESSION: MENDICITY MARKS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE 102
V. MAKING A HOME: THE ARENA OF PRIVATE ADJUSTMENT 144
VI. TRAINING THE YOUNG 204
VII. SPENDING LEISURE 242
VIII. RELIGION 295
IX. THE MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT 319
X. GETTING INFORMATION: THE PRESS 373
XI. KEEPING HEALTHY 388
XII. "THE MIDDLETOWN SPIRIT" 402
XIII. MIDDLETOWN FACES BOTH WAYS 487
APPENDIX I. THE SIZE OF THE CITY: 1925-1935 515
APPENDIX II. MIDDLETOWN'S BANKING INSTITUTIONS IN BOOM AND DEPRESSION 519
APPENDIX III. TABLES (For list of tables see pp. 525-28) 525
INDEX 581
community's life. And so progress recaptures and confines its own children.

Said a leading minister, speaking to Kiwanis: "In the old days people went to preachers for consolation, information, and inspiration. They still come to us for consolation, but go to newspapers for information and inspiration." This expresses succinctly the apparent role of religion in Middletown as an emotionally stabilizing agent, relinquishing to other agencies leadership in the defining of values.

CHAPTER IX

The Machinery of Government

Middletown has added to its police system since 1925 two police matrons, radio squad cars, tear gas, and machine guns; there are new traffic lights at some intersections, and downtown parking time limits; a motorized sweeper cleans the streets; a new City Hall provides more spacious quarters for the leisurely business of running the city; the Republicans are at the moment "out" and the Democrats are "in"; the mayor's salary is $3,400 instead of the former $3,000; the city budget (not including schools) dropped from $385,275 in 1925 to $362,879 in 1935, its assessed valuation from $60,000,000 to $40,000,000, and the combined tax rate rose from $2.66 for 1925 and $2.68 for 1929 to $3.10 for 1935. But, save for such minor shifts, the machinery of local government—barricaded behind some of the most rigid sanctions of this culture—has almost stood still, while the city's economic life has swung to its greatest heights and depths. An informed local citizen greeted the investigator on his return in 1935 with the statement: "Whatever changes you may find elsewhere in Middletown, you will find that our politics and government are the same crooked old shell game."

A bird's-eye view of what this "game" is and how it has worked since 1925 has been presented briefly by a nonpartisan local analyst of the city's affairs as follows: 1

Five phases of life in [Middletown] are discussed in the book [Middletown] under the heading of Community Activities. . . . The description of each seems to be fair and adequate, and that of local government perhaps too lenient rather than too severe.

The [Middletown] of 1934 was "governed" under the same antiquated plan described by the Lynds. . . . Popular ignorance of real technical issues encouraged continued indifference, and that, in turn, the dominance of one or the other of the political machines. Many prominent business and pro-

1 The local source of this written statement may not be disclosed. It was based both upon familiarity with local conditions and upon careful study of available records.
fessional men had by 1934 become more active than previously in civic affairs, but they shied from participation in politics, or were easily eliminated by the machines. National and State Governments had taken over most of the purely political issues, so local candidates, too smart to befuddle the popular mind with highly technical administrative problems, conducted campaigns on the vague issues of putting honesty into government, running out the gamblers, getting more Federal money poured into Middletown, wrecking the contractor's trust, and beautifying the city. Once the vital issue of utilities ownership came near being the subject of a special election, but an injunction halted the proceedings.

The pendulum had swung from the Republican monopoly of 1924 to a Democratic regime. ... A Democratic candidate for mayor in the 1934 campaign had held the office previously and had already served his penitentiary sentence, so he rated as machine candidate No. 1, defeated the incumbent in the primary, and was swept into office in the general Democratic landslide of that year. ... A local editor concluded that the previous administration should at least be given credit for rounding off some of the street corners.

In the past ten years of "enlightened" city government, there have been a few minor innovations. The city has undertaken, more or less spasmodically, the supervision of park recreation and other amusements, has instituted a modern radio and scout-car system, and has employed one and later two police matrons. Since 1924 there had been further agitation for a more modern plan of city government, but it has not again become a referendum issue. There was one encouraging aspect of the election of 1934: The young Republicans sought a candidate from among the younger businessmen of the city, and one without strong party ties. But the man they backed was badly defeated by the machine in the primary.

The returning visitor does not even rub his eyes, so familiar are the old civic issues: some people still want the railroad tracks that bisect the city elevated to remove the grade crossings, and the railroads and other people who own factories with sidings on this railroad continue to block the move; there is still trouble over the tendency of the impartial jury wheel to turn out the names of the needy favorites of...
politics, for one need not worry too much over failures if one is endowed with the best available facilities and things are inevitably getting better and better.

If the matter were pushed further into details and a Middletown citizen were asked what the government of his city is expected to do, his answer would probably run somewhat in this wise: Any city the size of Middletown must have a government, first of all to keep order—including everything from the suppression of crimes to the enforcement of contracts; then to provide certain safeguards to health such as pure water and waste disposal; to provide a good educational system; and generally to promote conditions likely to encourage home ownership and to make the city prosperous and a good place to live in. The informant might go on to add, if he is what is known locally as “pink,” certain governmental activities which to many of the “better” people are somewhat marginal: the provision of recreational facilities at public expense, possibly the public ownership of certain public utilities, and the care for the needy when their necessity passes a certain point—though he would not be very definite about this last.

If the questioner asked by what means the government performs these various functions, the answer would stress such symbols as democracy, the “two-party system,” the “will of the majority,” public service by elected representatives of the people, and “general welfare.”

There is no area of Middletown’s life, save religion, where symbol is more admitted and patently divorced from reality than in government, and no area where the functioning of an institution is more emmeshed in undercover intrigue and personalities. All of which makes it peculiarly difficult to show clearly the relationship between the means of government and the ends they allegedly serve. This relationship will perhaps appear most clearly in the analysis of three phases of city government: the office of mayor, the major civic problem of securing a modern sewage system, and the treatment of crime.

Ordinarily the machinery controlling Middletown’s office of mayor, like the rest of its governmental machinery, operates behind the scenes, with only a chronic rumble of minor protest in the open. But the mechanisms of control come somewhat more into the open in an occasional brawling civic scene when the controls have slipped momentarily and a maverick candidate rides into power. This last had happened in the fall of 1929, when the editor of the local Democratic weekly, a man who had never run for local political office before, had ridden into the mayor’s office on a South Side plurality of 3,499, polling what was until that time the greatest number of votes any man had ever polled for mayor. In the Democratic primary in 1928 he had defeated the regular Democratic party candidate for mayor and, against the united opposition of both regular parties, he took office in January, 1929, pledged to honest contract letting—a sore spot enlisting the support of the small Middletown taxpayer—and to a cleanup of local vice, gambling, and liquor, all long associated with local politics. He was regarded by many people as more honest, if more tactless, than the run of Middletown’s officeholders; he had a record as a fearless fighter who had attracted rational attention by his single-handed fight against the Ku Klux Klan when it had come into power in Middletown in 1924.8

To some Americans this man, George R. Dale, was the best-known citizen of Middletown. When he died at the age of sixty-seven in March, 1936, the Associated Press obituary commanded space of half a column or more in the press of New York, Chicago, and other cities. Dale was a “white-haired little man with the seat worn out of his pants” who for twenty years had edited a local Democratic weekly. Always fearless, he rose to national prominence when, almost single-handed, he fought the Ku Klux Klan which ruled the state and city in the mid-1920’s.

The Klan tried repeatedly to “get” him. Klansmen insulted him off the sidewalk in Middletown’s business section; the lady Klanswomen, known as the Kamilias, are reported to have spit on him on the streets; Klansmen waylaid him three times, beating him and twice attempting to shoot him. Charges were made in the Federal Court that two of Middletown’s policemen in the Klan administration had conspired to kill him. Dale repeatedly pilloried a local Klan judge in the columns of his paper, charging jury fixing and that crime was allowed to run rampant in Middletown because of the judge’s Klan connections. (This judge taught the largest adult Bible class in the city in Middletown’s leading Methodist church, “the big political church in town.”) The judge ordered Dale’s paper off the streets and eventually had the editor convicted on a contempt charge and sentenced to pay a $500 fine and serve six months in jail. Dale charged that his arrest was a straight case of Klan “fixing” and appealed the case four times. When the United States Supreme Court finally refused to pass on the question, Dale was pardoned by the governor. The case attracted nationwide attention and brought to the editor’s support nationally known lawyers like Samuel Untermyer because of a celebrated decision by the State Supreme Court that “the truth is no defense” in a contempt case.

Between 1926 and 1929, while the case was under appeal, Klan pressure deprived Dale’s little sheet of city, county, and state official advertising, its only advertising support; it was temporarily moved over the line into a town in the next state, where it continued to fire broadside after broadside at Middletown’s Klan. At the point when, with no money for legal defense, he and his wife and seven children were reduced to the verge of starvation, the New York World
and he was a man long familiar, as an opposition editor, with the details of local politics, and possessed of a habit of "speaking his mind" bluntly.

Typical of this forthrightness was his clash with the judge elected with him on his ticket. During his campaign he had asked the candidate for police judge, a man not of his own picking, to get out of the race. To this publicly made request, the candidate for judge is reported to have replied that, while he did not expect to win, his purpose in running was to embarrass the head of the municipal ticket as much as possible. The judge was subsequently swept into office with the new mayor. The latter promptly cleaned out the old police force, and within six weeks the new force presented to the judge 103 arrested men charged with handling liquor. Only three of the 103 were convicted.

The mayor ordered the police to take no more cases before the judge, announcing in his paper, "I've quarantined the judge." It was partly this directness and tactlessness which involved him from the outset in endless squabbles with his city council, which his enemies pointed to as evidence of his inefficiency.

His administration showed a quixotic disregard for "playing ball," "making deals," and political "face saving." As an outspoken, independent, lone-dog candidate unpopular with the businessmen, he entered office lacking the possibility of calling upon local men of ability to help him. A local editorial at the time of his death stated:

"The very fact that he was no "pussyfoot" won the reluctant but generally secret admiration of those who decried his methods and even denounced his motives.

... If you are an average citizen, you probably opposed many of the things for which George Dale stood, and because he had the special faculty of exciting prejudices against himself and his works by his utter lack of diplomacy, you may have declared in your exasperation at times, that he was never right about anything. And you would have been wrong, for he was right about many things. As we look back coolly upon his administration as mayor of Middletown, we are able to say among other favorable things that it was devoid of extravagance at a time when extravagance was common among public officers; that the city's affairs generally were cared for with efficiency. And there is nothing more important than these in the administration of any public chief executive. And whether you were a partisan of George Dale or an enemy, you give him credit today, at a time when it will do him no good whatever, for courage—a courage that was reckless at times, but nevertheless, courage in a day when too many men and women are prone to say, "On the one hand, but, again, on the other."

According to a newspaperman: "After he had been in office awhile, [Middletown] was closed up tight as a drum. He was effective against graft, but he had a weak crowd to work with, the city's businessmen were against him, and he could not get along with any of them."

*When a local editorial thundered him with not getting along with his council and urged him and the council to "put their feet under the same table," the mayor retorted dryly, "If we all put our feet under the same table there wouldn't be room for anyone else's feet."

The newly elected mayor of a neighboring city warned this Middletown mayor in the fall of 1930 after the election that the latter had made a big mistake in not having run a personal slate of councilmen. "You won't get any cooperation at all," he warned, "while my men will do anything I say." To which Middletown's mayor replied, "Wait till your councilmen realize that they've been elected and that you can't fire them." "And," Middletown's mayor told the investigator, "sure enough, within six months A——'s mayor was purple in the face over a job with his council: they had tried to get him to come along with them on a grading city coal contract."
local political "regulars" warned him that they would "get" him within three months.

When the attack came, it is significant that it was on no central public issue in a local political scene chronically replete with varied types of graft and corruption dear to both parties, but on the eloquently righteous charge that the mayor had caused a gallon of whisky to be transported to the State Democratic Convention.

This use of a charge extraneous to the central cluster of conventional civic corruptions as a device by the pot to call the kettle black is an interesting instance of the oblique crabwise tactics of pressure politics. The Eighteenth Amendment offered corrupt politics an effective neutral fence from behind which to do its sniping without attracting attention to itself. How popular this righteous prohibition charge became as a device to "get" the political opposition is reflected in the following editorial from the Middletown evening paper of April 17, 1933:

The mayors of [Middletown] and M— [a near-by city] are under indictment and the mayor of A— [another near-by city], who was indicted and who was supposed to have resigned last January, is free of his indictment and demanding his job back. These three cities are within a few miles of each other and all have virtually the same class of population. More or less directly, alleged violations of the prohibition laws had to do with the charges against all three mayors.7

When, therefore, Middletown found itself in 1930 with a stubborn mayor it could not intimidate on its hands, the world of political "fixing" turned to its familiar weapons. Indictments were secured before a Federal grand jury in March, 1932, against the mayor, his chief of police, and nine policemen alleged to have been involved in the transport of the gallon of liquor. The case was appealed and, while on appeal before the Federal Supreme Court, was terminated in December, 1933, by a Presidential pardon. The pardon took specific notice of perjury by witnesses against the mayor during the trial.

7 In January, 1930, a similar convenient use of a liquor charge at the heart of Middletown's political corruption center, the alliance between politics and road-building graft, brought streamer headlines in the press: "Resignation of Road Boss Asked." In this case, according to the press, a Republican county highway superintendent had originally been "asked" by the Democratic highway commissioners to resign "because the Board of Commissioners was Democratic." He had refused and court charges were subsequently brought against him for "intoxication, possession and transportation of liquor, inefficiency in office, and misuse of county property." He was later acquitted on the liquor charge.

When it appeared that the proposed ouster would be delayed by the mayor's appeal to the higher courts, his opponents in Middletown countered with two new moves. First, the city council, in September, 1932, claiming the authority of a State law making any person sentenced to six months or more in a Federal prison ineligible to hold office, voted the mayor's office vacant and elected a successor. It is significant that the man proposed to succeed him is now city controller under the succeeding "regular" Democratic administration. Of this ouster move a paper in the state capital said:

Once more the forces that do not thrive under honest government are after Mayor Dale of [Middletown]. This time the city council attempts to replace him with a member who, during the Federal court trial, was named as the paymaster for the unofficial agents who secured evidence against [the mayor]."8

Meanwhile, the "regular" local newspapers began speaking of the mayor, while the case was still on appeal, as "former mayor Dale" and "Dale, who claims to be mayor." The whole case was subsequently thrown out late in 1932 by the Superior Court, and the mayor promptly never took office.

Stalled thus by the appeal of the liquor charge and by the defeat of this effort to declare the mayor's office vacant, the "regulars" came back in January, 1933, with still a third wave of attack. The mayor, city attorney, city controller, and the fire-department secretary were indicted on twenty-six, twenty-six, eight, and eighteen counts respectively for conspiracy to coerce public employees. The charge involved the collection of "voluntary contributions" from employees on the city payroll for a legal "defense fund" for the indicted mayor. Here, again, the mayor had done, as a man of no private means and with no established party or business financial backing behind him, a thing so commonly practiced in Middletown party politics as ordinarily not even to excite comment or question.8 By July, 1933, these indictments, too,

8 Usually, however, the true purpose of these shakedown remains unremarkably unspoken. Thus the press announced some weeks before the mayor elected in the fall of 1932 took office that he would organize a Two Per Cent Club whereby all city employees would "voluntarily donate" that share of their salary to local relief. When he took office the plan was at once changed as noted in the following announcement:

"WELFARE CLUB IS ORGANIZED"

"POLITICAL WORK ALSO PART OF NEW ORGANIZATION"

"Puncturing both as a political and a welfare organization, the [Middletown] County Democratic Club was formed Thursday. [There followed here the names
were thrown out by the courts, and the mayor's opponents, defeated on three attempts to oust him, turned to see that he was not re-elected in 1934—which they succeeded in doing.

It is a significant commentary upon the disparity that commonly exists in Middletown between the private ends of the professional politicians and the public needs of the community that this prolonged conflict of the officers of the new club, with the city controller—the man referred to above as cited under oath as 'paymaster' in the effort to 'get' the preceding mayor's—was secret and unsung.

"Modeled after the [State] Democratic Club, sponsored by Governor M——, the new organization, which replaces the Two Per Cent Club, will carry on welfare work primarily. . . .

"Other objects announced are that the club will 'advance the principles of government advocated by Thomas Jefferson; promote the election of officers devoted to Democracy, and encourage cordial relations among the followers of the Jeffersonian theory; and will uphold the present state and national administration.' The organization is sponsored by the mayor." [Italics ours.]

"The announcement then went on to publish the "nine classifications of members, with dues fixed in correspondence with the salaries and wages earned." These dues were graded up from $1.00 a month for city employees earning less than $75 a month to $6.00 a month for those earning $300 and over.

The political aims of this club were loudly disguised under the announcement of the setting up of a city Social Welfare Department, consisting only of the volunteer services of a "publicity director" to "investigate conditions" (the publicity director being a wealthy local woman interested in charity and with a useful record of enlisting wide popular support for pet charities she publicized in the press); of welfare work by the two police matrons who distribute old clothing, etc., to the city; and a gift of $35 a month from the fund toward the amortization of the $3,800 mortgage on a home for forty old men set up by the local Gospel Mission. As a symbol of the mayor's solicitude for the workingman, this charity, very popular with the working class, was a good wet-nurse cause for the mayor to back with a flourish, especially as the $35 a year it would cost would not seriously impair the "more than $5,000" the assessment is alleged to net annually.

"It is characteristic that within six months of the beginning of the brave new reform administration of his successor as mayor in 1935, the afternoon paper was saying the new mayor's readiness to make friends and his optimistic belief that 'money grows on bushes.'

The mayor defeated for re-election in 1934 attributes his defeat to the fact that "I didn't want to make promises. [Middletown] people feel that it's a damned mean cuss who won't make promises. But [the candidate who defeated me] promised everybody everything; promised labor he'd treat them right, assured capital he would build a new firehouse in their district completely manned by Negro firemen—and so on. He loaded up all the city departments on the strength of these promises—and is now having to fire them for lack of money, doing so with the air of 'You see, boys, I did my damned best.' In the fall of 1935, its first year in office, as noted later in the present chapter, the new administration was skipping paydays.

Factional attack by the political "outs" upon the "ins" occurred during years when the city was ailing along skippers-under in the midst of the unprecedented need for united civic action in the depression.

In June, 1935, the city's political business was again proceeding as usual. The present mayor, a "regular" Democrat, is said to be in the predicament of having his earlier conviction to the Federal penitentiary banging like a sword of Damocles over his head, because of the State law making it illegal for a man who has served a Federal sentence of more than six months to hold public office. To this fact is attributed by some his shift from bearing in his earlier term a "people's candidate" to his present greater pliancy to the wishes of local business.

The mayor was "playing ball"; business was behind him—though, as always, as a cat is behind a mouse; an energetic young member of the X family, as noted above, had become the local Democratic leader, so that local business sat astride both parties; the city's financing was going forward through "regular" channels, and the mayor was not forced, as his predecessor had been on one occasion when local banking control blocked him, to peddle the city's bonds personally in Chicago.

The professional politician in a city like Middletown occupies in reality a position somewhat apart. He is not ordinarily a person accepted in the inner councils of the business class, and yet he must work with it in order "to get anywhere." And, on the other hand, the business class have, as noted in Chapter III, little respect for local politicians and politicians, viewing them as a necessary evil which business supports and controls only enough to insure cooperation in certain necessary matters. As a result, even in a business-sponsored administration like that which took office in 1935, squabbles between the city hall and the Chamber of Commerce arise from time to time. The opposition of the new mayor to the relief commissary, noted in Chapter IV, is a case in point. Another is the action of the mayor in forcing the Chamber of Commerce to side with him in a W.P.A. project favoring Middletown's working class before he would approve the pet project of the business class (opposed by the South Side) for an intercepting sewer.

In the midsummer of 1935 came the first jolt to local harmony under the new administration, when the citizens were confronted with a proposed civil city tax rate of $1.62. The Republican mayor elected in 1925 gave the city a city tax rate of 98 cents on an assessed valuation
of $60,000,000; and under his Democratic successor, the vigorous editor who took office in 1930, the rate had fallen steadily to 89 cents in his last year, 1934, despite a drop to $40,000,000 in the city's assessed valuation. Only after a closely marshaled attack by the Real Estate Board and Chamber of Commerce was the 1935 rate subsequently forced back down to 98 cents. Another jolt came in the early fall when the city was forced to pass paydays and some of the extra employees taken

Nothing better illustrates the managed helplessness of the small citizen not organized into a Real Estate Board or other compact pressure group than does the procedure at the public hearing on this tax rate. Questions were asked as to why the police force had been enlarged, and the questions were evade by the city controller. Two different citizens expressed the belief that if the "controller, clerk, and mayor would stay on the job expenses would be cut down." The mayor continues to operate his office as a practicing physician. The controller is referred to locally as the "ceo" of the local transportation system; he was reported in the summer of 1935 to be dickering with a group of other "insiders" to void existing franchises and set up a private corporation with a local bus monopoly. He is reported to have a personal stake in the newly organized municipal baseball team and to be himself sells pop under the grandstand when business is brisk. The controller pleaded in answer that he is elected for a term by a vote of 98 cents, which has built a modern sewage system and equals [Middleton] in other respects and still has lowered its tax rate to 51 cents. The controller replied that the city in question owns its own electric-light plant—only to be met with a chorus of, "Why doesn't [Middleton] own its utilities?"

And so the meeting trickled on its Dickering end.

On the day following the public hearing, the president of the largest building and loan company was quoted in the press under the headline, "Says Taxpayers Were Insulted—Public Protests Ignored," in part as follows: "After the public hearing was concluded and the council convened, the ordinance was read to us by the chairman of the council. Everything was cut and dried before we arrived and we might as well have stayed home. The council, particularly the chairman, failed to give its attention to what was said by the taxpayers, and gave no practical consideration at all to the protests made against a tax rate.

When the rate was eventually reduced to the more familiar figure of 98 cents after the pressure had been applied, a local editorial concluded with cynical designation that those on the inside knew all the time that the proposed rate of 98 cents was considerably above what they would get, that it was submitted merely for bargaining purposes, and that the final rate of 98 cents on an increased assessment value actually gave them "what they wished."

"While the rate remains the same," the editorial continued, "nearly a million dollars of increased property valuations and, therefore, the actual total to be paid in taxes next year will amount to many thousands of dollars more than were paid this year. . . . It is a serious error to place on boards [like the tax-adjustment board] a

A further factor in the apparent discrepancy between what Middleton wants its government as represented in the office of mayor to do and what actually gets done appears in the following comments:

Thus it may be said that back of nearly all the candidacies of those who wish to be mayor of Middleton for the next four years is some private and selfish interest; the voter being in the main ignorant of these tics may easily be deceived. It is all very depressing. What are we going to do about majority that represents the tax spenders. One such member would be enough. One does not permit a judge to preside in a case in which he is the defendant. That analogy may not be perfect but it's pretty good. This board, too, was handicapped by not having before it the detailed figures of proposed expenditures for comparison with these detailed expenditures of several past years. . . .

As it was, the board a good deal of the time was like a child playing in the dark.

"And the public offlicholders—not all of them but a good many of them—played the same old game they always play. They submitted estimates of expenses far above their needs and far above anything they expected to receive in order that when the cutting was completed they would still have more than they ought to have. . . ."

This enforced thinning of the ranks of the mayor's appointees was jubilantly hailed by his predecessor in the following editorial in his paper:

"TOO MUCH HIRED HELP"

"Reckless overloading of city departments with employees has resulted in the inevitable. The engineer's office was loaded up with seven employees. . . . Monday three were fired. They were told they had got scarce. It was discovered at the end of the first six months there was only $1,400 left to pay salaries for the next six months. The three deputies [assisting the City Engineer] who had been hired where but one grew in the last administration, wonder what is going to happen. They do not need to make a blueprint and train the compass on the doodled to divide $1,400 by four. The engineer's budget for 1936 is in the neighborhood of $12,000, about twice the amount allotted for that office in the five previous years. High-priced harmony may help out the discharged employees the first of next January, but five months is a long time between snacks.

And down in the police department much uneasiness prevails. The preceding mayor's administration managed to worry along with thirty-nine cops, but the new regime raised it to sixty-seven. They are all good policemen who contribute two per cent of their salaries every payday, along with firemen and other employees, to some great common undisclosed cause. But it takes money to pay a standing army. The 1935 police budget is fast nearing depletion and the forced retirement of a few battalions will result.

"The privates are rapidly being discharged because of a scarcity of funds and shortly, unless the miracle of the loaves and fishes repeats itself, there will be nobody but the commissioned officers left to rake the leaves in the parks and push the brooms in the streets and alleys."
"Politics here have been 'grab what you can and the devil take the hindmost.' The fellow who can promise the most gets elected and there have been plenty of promises." (Unprinted comment by a local newspaperman, June, 1935.)

One of these "private and selfish interests" is involved in the alleged long-time tie-up between local politics and the paving, road-building, and contracting interests in the city and county. The editor who won a surprise victory and became mayor in 1930 had for years shown up this alliance in his paper and had run on a platform pledging him to break up the local "contracting trust." His election was accordingly an affront to a vested interest. One of his first acts after taking office was the cancellation of $300,000 of new street contracts signed by his predecessor just prior to the latter's going out of office, and the making of new contracts at a reported saving of thirty-five cents a square foot. In November, 1936, a gravel bid was thrown out at the last moment because the county attorney insisted that the legal advertisement for the bids had been illegal in that it had narrowed the field so arbitrarily as to have "eliminated competitive bidding."

A second "interest" of great political importance for the mayor and city government is connected with gambling. Gambling has a long tradition in Middletown associated with the best city administrations. Periodically the city reads in its papers such stories as the following from the morning paper in August, 1935:

POLICE CLAMP DOWN THE LID ON GAMBLING
HALF DOZEN ESTABLISHMENTS CLOSED BY ORDER

In a "surprise" move which was none too surprising to those within slingshot range of the situation, all alleged gambling establishments within the city limits were closed by police order Tuesday and last night. The police lid, descending quietly but quite firmly, squeezed out of operation a half-dozen establishments, and the casualties included one horse-racing book, numerous short-card games, one crap game, and innumerable tip books. The places where gambling is said to have flourished were dark and deserted last night, but they were not the only places to feel the police clamp. A number of local beer establishments and pool halls which had

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THE FAMOUS LID

It is announced [ran the front page] that local gamblers were told they would either have to stop operations or be arrested and that they all quit. The [morning paper] published the story Friday morning. It was not stated who gave the order—the mayor, the chief of police, the president of the board of safety, or the vice squad. It was stated that some gamblers, not in good standing, decided to open up. Whether the others quit by request or organized a sympathetic strike is not certain. . . .

Nobody ought to get excited about hearing of wholesale gambling and other petty crimes in [Middletown]. A year ago last spring both political parties here nominated candidates for mayor who had distinguished themselves while in office before by especial consideration to the gambling fraternity. Apparently majorities of both parties voted for bigger and better gamblers, and now that they have got them, why worry? Let the people rule, say we.

Another editorial in 1935 in this same weekly paper stated in connection with a discussion of the prevalence of whispering campaigns in Middletown:
When I was elected mayor in 1929 ... one story whispered from house to house was to the effect that a bunch of Chicago gamblers, headed by —— and ——, put $15,000 in my campaign kitty and that I had agreed, in the event of my election, to oust the current short-card fraternity and put Chicago in charge of gambling concessions then held by local talent.

Early in this mayor's term of office, too, the city had gone through another of its lid-clamping gestures. Nine days after he took office in January, 1930, the headlines announced, "Police Head Says 'Dives' Are Closed," followed by a police warning against their reopening. All through January of that year the battle continued: "[Mayor] Wars on Cigar-store Card Games—Cleanup Campaign Is Instituted." Those operating the card-game houses promptly took the matter to court, and by the middle of the month the headlines announced: "Legal War on Card Playing Looms Here," followed a week later by the announcement: "Judge M.—Holds Card Playing Is Legal—Mayor Says He Will Continue to Arrest Men Playing Cards in Cigar Stores." Meanwhile, the press had carried the announcement that "The administration's ban on card playing in cigar stores is said to be causing a revival of pool and billiard playing." Although, as noted in Chapter V, this mayor's drive against prostitution and gambling relaxed after its first year, one still read in the papers in November, 1931, near the end of his second year in office, "The mayor denies that sixteen out of eighteen penny machines confiscated by the police about a month ago are back in use."

What one is witnessing in Middletown's gambling is a continuing, institutionalized form of leisure closely linked with local politics. The poolrooms and cigar-store card rooms are virtually the political clubs of the city, run by local politicians or by men closely associated with them. The inner business group may meet and make their decisions as regards local politics in quite another setting, but it is here in these shabby smoke-filled poolrooms and cigar stores, supplemended by the working-class lodges, that the small-time political lieutenants maintain their grip on the working-class voters year in and year out. The periodic "lid clamping" usually represent either or both of two things: a gesture to public sentiment in a heavily evangelical town and/or a much more realistic move to keep the local gambling world safe for the administration in power as a source of funds for political fence building and as centers for political contact and organization. It is significant that these cleanups tend to come early in each administra-

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PROTECTED VICE CONDITIONS IN [MIDDLETOWN] EXPOSED

As they have existed for the past two years and now exist with the full knowledge and consent of the Mayor, the Board of Safety, Chief of Police, the Police and Prosecuting Attorney.

Vice and gambling are in complete control of the city. [Middletown's] Police and Board of Safety, ... although they have been appealed to repeatedly, absolutely refuse to do anything to take any steps to stop this flow of Vice. The joints running under the jurisdiction and paid protection of [certain officials of the city specified by official designation] are the —— cigar store located at —— Street, operated and owned by A—. Another joint operated by the gambling chain is the store owned and operated by C—— located in the very heart of the city upstairs on

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15 It is, however, unfair to load all of this mayor's motive for his cleanup upon his personal political realism. As stated above, he was an eccentric, a combination of old-fashioned outspoken idealist and hard-headed realist. An editorial in another paper commented in the midst of his cleanup in January, 1930, that "Mayor Dale is in earnest about cleaning up the big gambling and loose joints."
the northeast corner of — and — Streets. The third joint belonging to this chain of gamblers is located at — Street, and is operated by B—.

Employed at the A— joint is A—, defeated candidate for [public office]. He is the brother of A—, owner and operator of the joint, which runs under the paid protection of our local police. A—, the proprietor of this said joint is a brother-in-law of Councilman —. Young Walter A— (a minor) is also employed at this joint. A—'s son, Jim A—, is using sucker money to broaden his education at the University of —. Incidentally the A— family is cleaning plenty of sucker money from their chain of gambling joints to educate several other A—s.

The A— joint is located directly opposite the Court House, which houses our Prosecutor and Sheriff. Upstairs above the cigar store we find a race-horse bookmaker, with special ticker service. Bud B— operates the horse book. B— formerly lived in a beautiful $25,000 Westwood home. So far as can be learned, his name has never appeared on any factory payroll, nor has he ever been known to have been in any legitimate business. This horse-book business has been pretty soft for Bud, but we don't know of any of the boys that play the outside of the race-horse game who ever did live in Westwood. When the suckers don't play the ponies in sufficient numbers to satisfy A— and B—, they send out their "riding baliff" [sic] Henry D—, on his trusty bicycle. He carries his race form sheet with him, together with some hot tips, direct from the track, and entices suckers both rich and poor to give him a bet. One of his most distinguished customers is Z— [a school athletic coach], and [athletic] fans swear and declare that the success or failure of [his teams] is controlled by his success with ponies.

Then not last nor least is the big poker game, right upstairs with the horse bookie. If it's not one gamble, it's another. This game is in charge of E— and C—, and can anyone ever remember of any one of these eminent Knights of the Greencloth doing any manual labor? Each Thursday night is Smoker Night. They feed the sucker a 10¢ free lunch and take his last cent over the green cloth and leave a helpless wife and unfortunate children to get along the best they can.

Then comes the real steal, "crooked jackpot tip books." These books are so crooked that the sucker has absolutely no chance whatsoever of winning. These books are outlawed and banned in almost every state in the Union and every city of the state. The proprietor has a code to go by. He sometimes lets an outsider win a jackpot, but it is a very, very rare occasion. The proprietor knows the exact book the jackpot is in and knows exactly where the ticket is located on the book that will win the tip and the jackpot. This joint sells as many as 250 of these crooked books in one day, which makes the house a profit of hundreds of dollars. Some men spend their entire week's wages to win a jackpot, but very seldom are they successful.

It is the Women and Children who suffer from the fathers' losses at these gambling joints, and many complaints have gone into the Police Dept., Prosecutor, and Sheriff, and the answer is always the same: "Come up and file charges and we will arrest them." [The authorities have] refused point blank time and again to accept affidavits against our chain gamblers when unimpeachable evidence was laid in their laps. Why is it necessary for a defenseless woman to expose herself to the humiliation and contact with a gang of gamblers, so she might preserve the husband's wages for the necessities of life, for her children and herself?

It is the duty of our Police Dept. to rid the city of all this Vice regardless of who is doing it or whomever it affects. A—, head of the gambling chain, and [a certain police officer] are bosom friends. They go fishing, hunting, and drinking together, and only recently returned from a big trip out of town, where they spent several days hunting together. There were also other city officials on this trip. Looks like it would be rather embarrassing for friend [police officer] to have to arrest friend A—. A— and B— were arrested during the last grand jury investigation for owning and operating a gambling house, and poor B— was allowed to plead guilty for gambling, and was subsequently assessed a small fine. In a recent term of court, [a local official specified by name] comes to the rescue of A—, king of the gambling chain, and moves the court for the following reason: That said A— was jointly indicted with B— in said cause for keeping a building and room for gambling; that said B— has pled guilty and I believe there is not sufficient evidence to convict A—, and therefore ask the court to dismiss said cause against said A—. This is what we call a [public official] performing in behalf of the gamblers.

The administration took office Jan. 1, 1935. A—, at that time, was operating a gambling house full blast. The Grand Jury was called soon after it took office, but A— continued to gamble all the time the Grand Jury was in session. Feeling that the protection of [the police, including] his old hunting partner, would immune him from being indicated by the Grand Jury, A— holds the lease on the building, has the beer license, and is the owner of the establishment from top to bottom. Knowing these facts, why did the officials permit B— to plead guilty and exonerate an accomplice who was equally guilty? A— also sells beer in this gambling joint. [Officials have] acknowledged that they knew all this gambling was going on. One of them even acknowledged he entered the A— establishment to get a check cashed and had to wade through tip tickets to get to the counter. Despite these facts and although the officials have the power,
they have never once yet called for a Grand Jury to clean up the deplorable conditions that exist in our city.

The Grand Jury has been drawn and now is the time for them to be called into session. Not only investigate these deplorable conditions, but investigate why our Board of Safety, our Police Dept., and other law enforcement officials do not take steps to curb this flow of crime when they know it is going on and who is doing it. We demand an immediate calling of the Grand Jury and we will furnish the honorable body dozens of responsible witnesses who can and will testify that children of school age are permitted to frequent these places and are losing there money by gambling. Please watch for my next issue of [MIDDLETOWN] which will be published at a later date.14

Like gambling, beer has been seized upon by Middletown's politicians as a valuable source of power, patronage, and perhaps profit. The candid weekly paper described this situation as follows:

THE BEER BARONS

The sale of beer and more potent intoxicants has been legalized by State law, but the law will quickly become obnoxious and will be repealed if the State does not protect honest dealers against any “squeeze play” attempted in any unit of local government.

One of the three local wholesale distributors is said to have the city-administration blessing, and the power of suggestion, and possibly stronger urging, has been put to work to force vulnerable retailers to patronize that particular distributor. For instance, a representative of that particular wholesaler entered a local “tavern” recently. “Well,” he remarked, “you are fixed fine here, with a baseball ticket, blackboard, and everything,” and then he walked out. That was real salesmanship. The proprietor of the place ordered some of his beer. “He didn’t have to write down on my blackboard what he meant,” said the wise retailer. “What he really meant was that I’d better buy in the right place or get bobbed. I don’t like it but I ain’t lookin’ for no trouble.”

One wholesale dealer had the exclusive agency for a particular brand of beer. Without notice the brewery gave the agency to the “administration” distributor, and the word was soon spread among the retailers what kind of beer they had better buy if they wanted to get along easy like, without

14 It is not intended here to underwrite the details of such a popular arrangement. Some of the individuals may be innocent of the charges made. For obvious reasons, all names have been changed in reprinting the above. The significant point to note is that conditions of the types here described are endemic in the political life of Middletown.

THE MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT

friction. Other retailers with applications for license pending do not hesitate to say that they have been told that they must buy of so and so if they want to get their licenses... Something will bust loose if this practice continues.

Further evidence of this political tie-up appeared in the protests of a local tavern keeper over the denial to him by the State Alcoholic Beverage Commission of a renewal of his license in the summer of 1933. According to this proprietor, as quoted in the local afternoon paper, he had been singled out at the instigation of the local politicians as the only applicant in the county to be denied a license:

“The [Middletown] city administration did it. The local Democratic machine has been trying to ‘get’ me, and it has succeeded—at least temporarily. It served virtual public announcement of its intentions when it had police ‘pinch’ my little pin punchboards several weeks ago when at the same time the big baseball-tip boards and other punchboards are running wide open all over town—and are still running without the slightest police interference. When these people announced that they would get me, I said they were not big enough to do it, but I guess I took in too much territory. It seems they were big enough. Then, too, the local wholesalers of beer were pretty mad at me. I have not bought any beer of them for six months. Instead I have been buying it directly from the brewery more cheaply than the [Middletown] wholesalers would sell it to me. I understand arrangements are already under way to lease the room on which I now have a lease. If I were to give up the lease, another saloon would be operating there within six weeks.” A—[the proprietor] asserted that several other taverns have been licensed here whose reputations are far worse than that of [his tavern] and he named them and gave his reasons for the statement.15

All these perplexities surrounding the work of its elected officers suggest a conflict between the things Middletown wants its government to do and what is actually accomplished under the rituals according to which it carries on the processes of government. This same con-

15 A large section of local public opinion undoubtedly favored the denial of a renewal of license to this tavern. It is the heavily frequented “dive” in the center of the business section described above and had been in operation a year at the time its license was denied. Its central location and notoriety may have been factors in local pressure to deny its license, but it is probable that other factors such as those cited above were also involved, as Middletown has a habit of tolerating houses of prostitution, gambling places, and other things which the more fastidious local people regard as “nuisances” easily if those in charge do the proper things.
flict appears further in the chronic predicament involved in trying to get adequate city sewage disposal.

Middletown wants a clean and healthy city. It has largely, though not entirely, left behind an age in which privies and wells stood side by side in back yards and garbage ripened at the mercy of sun and wind, but in 1935 it still dumped its sewage along with the excrement of a packing house and the waste of other industries into the convenient river that meanders in wide loops across the city. For the X family, who built their row of mansions along the river before White River had ceased entirely to be white, it is literally true that in midsummer when the wind is from the river they must keep their front windows closed; while to many lesser folk the stench and mosquitoes are a perennial hot-weather problem. One paper remarked: "[Middletown] should provide a good opening for a clothes-pin factory. The clothes-pins could be worn on their noses by [Middletown] residents during the hot weather so long as they tolerate the cesspool misnamed White River in its present noxious condition." The Izaak Walton League laments the absence of fishing, nobody uses the river for pleasure, and the farmers below the city have a difficult problem with their grazing herds in pastures bordering the river. In terms of standards of health, comfort, real-estate valuation, and civic self-respect which Middletown sets for itself, it would seem that it wants to move on to a more modern stage of civic sewage disposal. There has in fact been agitation for such a modernization of its sewage disposal for twenty years. By early 1930 the whole problem had reached the point where there were suits pending against the city by farmers in the county for river pollution; and the Chief Engineer of the State had declared, to quote the summary of his decision in a local editorial, that "[Middletown] either must build an intercepting sewer and sewage-disposal plant now or do it later, and, if later, probably pay in addition heavy damages to individuals and possibly to whole communities whose property and health have been affected by the contamination of the stream here."

The oldest controversial factor in this situation derives from the fact that the river incontinently loops its way through the North Side of the city. Strive as local reformers will to insist that it is for the good of the entire city to clean up White River, the working class on the South Side, through their councilmen, view the cost of the proposed new sewage system—about $1,100,000—as none of their affair. They are still

paying for a faulty South Side sewer laid under the present mayor in his earlier administration, and they resent the alleged efforts of the wealthier North Side to tax them for a new sewer which "will benefit primarily the few rich people uptown who own property along the river." Thus Middletown's working class easily personalizes the situation and sees it as an affair of the millionaire X family rather than as a community matter.16

Another deterrent to action on such a big project arises from the fact that Middletown's political world is one in which it is natural for the press to announce in a matter-of-fact way whenever the city changes mayors such items as the following:

Plum Tree to Be Shaken Monday.17

Office seekers and those looking for political favors for their friends and relatives continued today to flock in numbers to the City Hall.

Mayor Starts Administration Off with Entirely New Police Force.18

New Mayor Places Third Relative on City Payroll.

Turnover in City Hall Offices Complete; Only Two Persons Left Over from [Republican] Administration, and Those Just Temporary.

Under such institutional arrangements somebody will, it is assumed, be likely to make a "niece personal pile" out of a contract of upwards of $1,000,000, and no political faction can quite bear to see any

16 The same North Side vs. South Side opposition appeared when, after a wealthy citizen offered to donate to the city the land for a local airport in 1930, the city council failed to pass an ordinance authorizing a necessary $125,000 bond issue to develop this municipal airport. Here again the interest of the younger generation of the X's in aviation was a potent reason for the South Side's unwillingness to be taxed for an airport.

17 These items are all from the papers of the first ten days of January, 1930, but they can be duplicated in the opening days of any change in local party control. (See Middletown, pp. 423-24.)

A variant on this was introduced during the period of the earlier study when the Ku Klux Klan waxed strong throughout the political forces of the city and Klansmen and their wives were substituted in wholesale fashion for more Republicans or Democrats on the appointive offices and boards at the command of local politicians.

18 This note in the press was followed three days later by the headlines: "Window-breaking Epidemic—An Effort to Embarrass New Police Force," followed by a statement that the "Vandalism was aimed at showing resentment of [the new Democratic mayor's] ousting of [his Republican predecessor's] police department."
other have the plunder. Furthermore, the controlling business group has a deep and genuine conviction that if a maverick Democratic administration not under its control happens to get into power, as it did in 1930, there will certainly be more mismanagement and graft than if a "regular" administration has the contract letting in its hands.

Again, when councilmen are elected and not appointed (and removable) by the mayor, there is further chance of conflict as to just who shall be "in" on the business of contract letting; and question also arises, as it did in January, 1930, as to whether the job should be done under the board of works or under a sanitary commission.

Into this twenty-year-old stalemate came an order of the State Board of Health in January, 1930, that the city should make immediate provision for the disposal of its sewage as would clean up the river. Again, a year later, the State Board of Health forwarded a demand for action. The administration, faced with a million-dollar project in the midst of the depression, was locked in a political checkmate between the administrative and the legislative branches of the city government and was unable to act; and some of the mayor's opponents even taunted him with being devoid of civic pride. When, in 1933, Federal funds began to be available for such civic projects, the city hired an expert from Cleveland to draw plans and the mayor announced his intention of seeking funds from Washington. At this point, according to the mayor's statement, an attorney for the X family approached the mayor to tell him to come down and consult with one of the X's or he would have no chance of getting a Federal grant. The mayor, as he told the story, "told [the attorney] to go hell and to take [X] with him," got on a train for Washington, and returned with a grant of $1,000,000 from Secretary Ickes. The faction opposing the sewer project, including the "regular" Democratic candidate being put forward for mayor in the fall of 1934 and the X's attorney referred to above, are alleged to have connived with the city council to block acceptance of the Federal grant. Reference to this "deal" is commonly heard in Middletown and was specifically charged in print by one of the city's independent citizens. The State representative of the P.W.A. has been quoted in print in Middletown as saying in 1934 that "Some irresponsible from Middletown came to the state capital and assured him that 'We will block this sewer project until [the present mayor's] term of office expires,' and that 'The mayor plans to get $1,000,000 for himself outside of the deal.'" According to the printed statement of the man who was mayor at the time, "These [local] people, some of them 'highly important' individuals, secretly gummed the works and the council refused to pass the necessary ordinance of acceptance of the government loan."

The Washington offer of funds was canceled in September, 1934—to the disgust of many bewildered citizens and of the afternoon paper, which insisted that the problem of securing decent sewage disposal had got beyond the point of being tolerated as a political football. Under the new mayor in 1935, the city drew up a proposal for a $1,250,000 project, $65,000 more than the project under the preceding administration, and promptly went eagerly hat-in-hand again to Washington. In late October, 1935, a local editor lamented that the "sewer project lies unapproved in Washington. . . . Too, [Middletown] is in the uncomfortable position of asking the Federal government to do something the latter once agreed to do, only to be turned down by the city council. . . . Having passed up one offer of government help, it would not be a necessarily unsafe bet that if [Middletown] is to have the interceptor [sewer] and plant she will have to find a way to build it out of her own funds. . . . The city is too nearly broke to consider an adequate bond issue for this purpose—or any purpose.”

22 This man, independently well off, is the son of an old Middletown family and maintains his home there, though he spends much time out of the city. He is independent, keen, and somewhat of a local "character." His home is adjacent to the river and the new sewer has been a personal hobby—so much so that he paid out of his own pocket to have preliminary surveys made early in the depression leading to the bringing in of the Cleveland engineering firm in 1933 to draft the detailed plans for the sewer and sewage-disposal plant.

23 A final dew to the charming of the original 1934 Federal grant and the 1935 reapproval of the plan by the city administration at a $65,000 increase in cost may lie in the sole change in the plan in 1935, which removed the site of the proposed sewage-disposal plant a mile further west of town. This shift, according to the local press, "would provide for the future development of a section west of Middletown now being developed." This is the section in which the new subdivisions have been pushing westward into the cornfields.
The citizens themselves do not understand the pressure factors behind this situation, any more than they understand the backstage dickering that increased their police force so sharply when General Motors moved back to town. They are puzzled by this spectacle of public-spirited citizens and elected representatives of the people blocking in 1934 a project long recognized as highly desirable for public health and comfort, and then turning about a year later and seeking feverishly to carry through the project themselves. They wonder, too, that, after campaigning on the South Side in the fall of 1934, the new administration proceeded to sponsor a plan to cost $80,000 more. Again, a campaign device used (by the administration voted in the fall of 1934 against the then concluding administration) to inflame Southsiders was the whipping up of an old South Side antagonism to sewers in general, by reviving the very sore point of the defective South Side sewer built by the city some years before; and yet, citizens who stop to think recall that the contract for this earlier sewer, for which a later city administration subsequently sued the contractors because of its faulty construction, had actually been let under a previous administration of the same mayor who in 1934 used the iniquities and extravagance of the earlier sewer as an argument to secure South Side votes.

At length, in 1936, the regular Democratic mayor, unimpeached either by his city council or by the business group, secured a Federal grant of $340,000 (one-third of the amount secured by his predecessor and vetoed by the council) and, with a city appropriation of $186,000, a part

55 "Woeful cries and tears were shed for the South Side by politicians who sought votes last year for their coming campaign.... No tears are being shed for the South Side now." (Democratic weekly, September 6, 1935.)

56 Middletown quotes the following from a local newspaper in 1934: "City loses $101,800 suit, sewer found defective after it was accepted by the board of works and the contractors had been released from their obligations. Bricks and brickbats used instead of cement in interments." (p. 444.)

26 The Democratic weekly reported these tactics as follows on August 30, 1935: "One of the favorite arguments used [in the 1934 campaign] was made by professional Southsiders, whose only interest in the South Side sewer is to inflame voting fever by referring to the South Side sewer and pleading in behalf of citizens who have paid for a defective sewer and were to be required to pay for another. It seems to have been forgotten, or purposely overlooked, that the South Side sewer was projected and the contract let by the [present mayor's] previous administration, and that one of the flock of deputies now employed by the city was the city engineer at that time. Professional Southsiders who live north of the railroad forget so easily, after accomplishing their political desires."

27 One of the things Middletown expects its city government, so constituted and so functioning, to do is to prevent, or at least to control, crime. It would appear from the police records that the varying conditions of the years of boom and depression may have had little if any more effect upon the prevalence of what Middletown chooses to call "crime"—i.e., the things for which it arrests people—than the fact of whether each successive city administration was in its "new-broom" or "old-broom" phase. The full effects of the depression upon tendencies to violate group codes are, however, too subtle for appraisal as yet. Total annual arrests appear to have exhibited a fairly constant rate of 33 to 38 per 1,000 of population during the years immediately preceding the depression; they increased sharply in 1930 and 1931 to 49 and 44 respectively, fell off abruptly to 25 in 1932, and then climbed back until in 1934 and in the first five months of 1935, they were again running somewhat above the pre-depression ratio.

28 This sharp increase in 1930 suggests a genuine depression impact of the sort one might superficially expect in hard times; but the halving of the 1930 rate in the difficult year 1932 and the relatively low rate in 1933 throw this hypothesis in doubt. One factor in this drop in 1932 may be the increasing acceptance by the community as the depression wore on of the necessity for providing public relief to the able-bodied, thereby lessening somewhat their need to beg, borrow, or steal. But this hardly accounts entirely for the decline after 1930 and 1931. The causes of these sharp fluctuations in arrests probably lie in part at least elsewhere than in the obvious factor of the immediate pressure of the depression on the population. In a small, neighborly city like Middletown where crime tends to be home grown rather than perpetuated by the type of roving criminal which congregates in large cities, there was possibly some tendency for the police to be lenient regarding certain types of small first offenses during the bad years 1932-33; though

29 See the discussion of this and other W.P.A. projects in Ch. IV.

28 See Table 44 in Appendix III.
the city was, as noted below, intensely excited over the prospect of bank
bankruptcy in these years, and police pressure against certain more serious
climbs probably actually increased. Another and even more important
factor influencing this fluctuation in arrests concerns the ebb and flow
in local politics. As usual, the municipal campaign of 1929 had fea-
tured the pledge to “clean up the town,” and since the winning can-
defeat was unusually energetic about it, Middletown was shortly “closed
up tight as a drum.” But, as noted earlier, the mayor experienced
difficulty in getting the city judge to convict the cases brought to court
and temporarily “quarantined the judge” in 1930 by ordering the
police to make no more arrests on liquor charges. Under these circum-
cumstances, according to a press reporter covering the city hall and court-
house for his paper, “After the big drive, enthusiasm for reforming
the city waned, to pick up again in the campaign year, 1934. The
two years 1932-33 were an ‘in between’ period of the mayor’s adminis-
tration.” Unfortunately, detailed police records are not available for
years prior to 1931, but arrests in each of the years, 1931-34, for sex
offenses, for gambling, and for liquor charges 28 appear to corroborate
this suggestion of sharp fluctuations in administrative zeal. Arrests for
all sex offenses dropped from sixty in 1931 29 to nine in 1932, and to
two in 1933; for gambling and keeping a gambling house, from 108
in 1932 to eighteen in 1933; for liquor offenses, from 661 in 1932 to 356
in 1933, and 270 in 1933, though these rose again sharply to 469 in
1934.29 Arrests for motor-vehicle offenses suggest the same erratic shifts
in police alertness, dropping from 156 in 1931 to 57 in 1932, rising
again to 118 in 1933, and falling off to 46 in 1934.

The annual totals of arrests on charges more directly associated with
property and violent assaults upon persons—forgery, issuing fraudulent
checks, arson, petit larceny, burglary and grand larceny, carrying
deadly weapons, and murder and homicide—remain fairly constant
and show small evidence of a local crime wave generated by the depres-
sion. The outstanding exception is that of arrests for petit larceny,
which rose from 67 in 1931 to 80 in 1932, to 112 in 1933, and then
dropped sharply to 50 in 1934. The “burglary, banditry, robbery, house-
breaking and grand larceny” group dropped slowly from 26 in 1931
to 16 in 1934. Arrests for issuing fraudulent checks dropped away from
12 in 1931 to 10 in each of the years 1932 and 1933. The heavy pro-
gram of public relief from 1931 on undoubtedly operated to hold down these
crimes against property and persons.

During the four and a half years from January, 1931, to June, 1935,
juvenile arrests remained low and did not fluctuate as much as adult
arrests, as shown by the following figures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total arrests</th>
<th>Adult arrests</th>
<th>Juvenile arrests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>1,234</td>
<td>2,049</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>1,183</td>
<td>1,113</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>1,398</td>
<td>1,320</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>1,837</td>
<td>1,796</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935 (first 5 mos.)</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>865</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These relatively low totals of juveniles arrested do not exhibit the
actual situation which has been troubling many in the community, if
we are to believe those in touch with Middletown’s youth. The prin-
cipal of the large South Side junior high school was quoted in Chapter
IV as saying, “Our boys at the —— Junior High School did a good
deal of stealing during this last winter [1934-35], and the ominous
thing has been the increasing extent to which they seem to feel that
it is O.K. if they can get away with it.” Testimony of this sort suggests
that, despite the fall in petit larceny arrests in 1934 and the standstill
of juvenile arrests over the four years, there may be in process a subtle
shift in morale among the young not revealed by the figures for juve-
nile arrests.

The sex ratio of offenders exhibited little change. The percentages
of females, both white and Negro, were high in 1931, owing largely
to the campaign against prostitution, and the percentages of males
were correspondingly lower in the same year than in any of the follow-
ing years. The facts that Negroes, comprising only 5.7 per cent of
Middletown’s population in 1930 and almost entirely confined to the
low income group, constituted throughout approximately 17 per cent

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28 See Table 45 in Appendix III.
29 Though figures are not available, arrests for sex and liquor offenses were
probably even higher in 1930, the first year of the new mayor’s “reform adminis-
tration.”
30 There is little evidence of any abatement in gambling or in the volume of
illegal sex activity during the worst of the depression. Money was scarce, but
more women were on the streets looking for “pickups” for even twenty-five
cents and half a dollar, while the pressure to augment small sums in the local
small-stake gambling games was great. In the case of liquor, as noted in Ch. V,
there is reported to have been a sharp increase in drinking locally in 1930-31,
characterized as accompanying “a general loosening of public morals.” This
may have influenced the high total of sex offenses somewhat, although the great
bulk of the sex arrests in 1930 and 1931 were in cases involving prostitution.
of the persons arrested, and that Negro males, in nearly all cases engaged in unskilled marginal jobs, rose slowly but steadily in percentage of arrests as the depression progressed, suggest an apparently growing economic pressure in the case of those at the very bottom of the social and economic scale.32

Middletown’s state was the home of Dillinger and the scene of a number of his daring crimes. From 1931 on, the city became highly excited over banditry, as neighboring cities and villages experienced bank holdups. A County Vigilantes Society was organized to protect the banks early in 1932, and in the fall of 1933, eight-column headlines shouted, “[Middletown] Acts as Outlaws Run Wild: Blockading of Streets is Urged by [Chief of Police].” Out of this scare came, early in 1934, the appropriation of funds for five police radio squad cars and three motorcycles, and headlines informed all and sundry of “Modern War School for Our Police: Machine Gun and Bomb Technique Taught.” In a press statement in 1935 the police attributed the decrease in various forms of robbery, which “have been averaging two or three a day, to the greater mobility of the police in these speedy squad cars.” While increasing the police force is not ordinarily regarded by experts as a major deterrent to crime,33 the deterring effect of such mechanized policing in a small city like Middletown is probably real. For in a small, peaceable, native-born population like Middletown’s there tend to be few hardened habitual criminals; big-city criminals may occasionally use the Middletowns as a quiet hideaway, but they are not likely to stay in cities of this size and “work” them repeatedly, because of the greater ease with which they can be caught. Furthermore, the research staff, fresh from New York with its omnipresent policemen, was struck by the inconspicuousness of Middletown policemen; there was one officer who directed traffic at a crowded corner opposite

32 The percentage distributions of persons arrested, by sex, and by whites and Negroes, are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Whites</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Negroes</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>2,173</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>1,133</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>1,338</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>1,337</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935 (first 5 mos.)</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

33 See Middletown, p. 428, n. 16.

a bank and another was engaged in going the rounds of the business section to check up on over-long parking; but one usually walked through a mile of shady residential streets anywhere about town without encountering a policeman. Most of Middletown’s crimes against property are “small-time” affairs. Negroes steal chickens, hungry men hold up small groceries (sometimes, according to press reports, even apologizing to the owner for taking the $30 from his till), and boys rob coal sheds. To people of this sort the possibility of having squad cars concentrated upon an isolated spot in five minutes by telephone probably represents a genuine deterrent.

Under pressure from both sides—fear of a “crime wave” on the one hand, and, on the other, an enhanced sense of the straits in which the unemployed have found themselves in the depression—the judicial machinery in Middletown has wavered. Sentences have tended to be heavy; for instance, a ten-year sentence was given to an unemployed youngster for holding up a grocery for $75, and one to ten years to two Negroes for stealing forty chickens.34 But this tendency to “put down crime” by heavy sentences has been offset occasionally by judicial wavering in the other direction. Thus we see the judge in one case sentencing an unemployed father of six children to a $20 fine and thirty days in jail for stealing coal in midwinter, and then stepping out of character to express to the court his regret that the sentence had to be imposed. As the State institutions became more and more crowded during the depression and taxpayers more clamorous over costs, the local judge of the Juvenile Court hit upon the plan of taking juvenile offenders on a threat tour of the reformatory and then turning them loose on probation. The press announced that the judge had “saved $11,000 of taxpayers’ money on thirty-one such cases by this procedure in 1931.” If judges in adult cases have, in the main, tended to press home high sentences, they have apparently done this in the face of some increase in resistance on the part of the common folk who compose juries, for a prosecuting attorney protested to a civic

34 While the research staff was in Middletown the press carried a prominent story from another county in the state on the sentencing of two boys, aged fourteen and seventeen, to ninety-nine years each for horsewhipping with his own handcuffs a sheriff who had just arrested them for stealing an automobile. A bit of grim hilarity ensued a few days later when the State prison refused to admit them because of their tender age, and the State reform school likewise refused on the legal ground that it could not receive boys with ninety-nine-year sentences. The sentence had subsequently to be reduced.
club during the depression that jurors were getting more apathetic about "doing their duty, and law enforcement is thereby rendered harder."

In this whole matter of crime and its treatment Middletown is today, as in 1925, working with an equipment of institutions encased in a rigid legal and ideological framework generated by sentiments of right and wrong that have tended to be all blacks and whites. The city still states its crime problem negatively as a thing to be kept down and checkmated. And the close connection between the handling of crime and the prevailing political system operates as a heavy check against any tendency to review crime in its relation to factors wider than the waywardness of the individual.

Through such a jungle of equities and connivings, public pledges and private deals, Middletown does its civic work, with "good will," "civic spirit," "private gain," and "we're not as crooked as they are" claims and charges inextricably intermixed. Middletown businessmen who seek to lessen the wastes of the civic administrative system believe themselves to be working for the public good, and those who seek to break the grip of the North Side on local affairs believe just as sincerely that they are trying to save the mass of the city's population from exploitation. If much of the roast pig is lost in the burning down of the house or if an undue share of the carcass goes to the politicians and their allies, this is regarded as simply inevitable and in the nature of things.

Valuable chunks of the pig may even become diverted from the mass of ordinary citizens who represent that vague concept "the public interest" to one or another of the extraordinary citizens who happen by accident or design to stand in with local officialdom, as suggested by such incidents as the following. An "ordinary" citizen in Middletown considered buying a home on a dusty unimproved street outside the city limits on the western edge of town, and he asked the officials in charge whether it was planned to surface the street. The reply was that no information of that sort could be given out in advance, whereupon he dropped the matter. "Within six weeks," he reports, "an agent of the X's bought that house and others near by and the government began to surface the street," over the possibly...

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**THE MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT**

Capricious protests of taxpayers in other parts of town that "it was a real-estate deal of the millionaires." In the Westwood real-estate development the streets were paved by the city under an agreement, according to the editor who was then mayor, whereby the cost would be repaid by direct assessment on adjoining property. After the work was completed the assessments were never collected, and subsequently, he alleged, the city taxpayers paid the bill.

The same ambiguous relationship between the private citizen and his government appears in the sudden increase of the city police force in 1935 from the usual thirty-nine to upwards of sixty, despite the greater mobility of the force afforded by radio cars. In Chapter II is reported the alleged pledge of the city administration to local industry in 1935 that "There will be no labor trouble in [Middletown]." This assurance synchronized with the removal of the Toledo General Motors plant to Middletown, following the Toledo strike in the spring of 1935. It also synchronized with the 50 per cent increase in Middletown policemen. To Middletown taxpayers, particularly to the working class, confronted by a request to increase the police department's budget from $83,255 to $124,182, again to quote from a local editorial, "You've got to know a lot of politics even to begin to figure out what it all means."

All these things irk Middletown, as the following press comments show:

[Middletown] is receiving the kind of advertising he does not appreciate. Yet we cannot say we do not deserve it. Whatever may be wrong in this community where so much also is right lies squarely and bawlingly on the doorstep of the voters. (October, 1932.)

**NO COMMUNITY COURAGE HERE**

One great trouble with the [Middletown] civic situation . . . is that the average [Middletown] citizen does not have the common ordinary courage that would make a better situation out of an almost intolerable one . . . (October, 1932.)

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88 See Middletown, pp. 427-34.

89 A State law seeks to protect local taxpayers by limiting the permissible size of the notoriously politically controlled city police forces in the state to one policeman for every 1,000 of the population. This would place Middletown's maximum at forty-seven, and as late as 1934 the city had only thirty-nine policemen. This State-fixed ratio was set before the advent of squad cars, and, according to a local press statement, "Most cities estimate a squad car as equal to 13 to 14 foot policemen."
The city council, as it is constituted in [Middletown], nearly always is a feeble thing. It is tottery and weak. Usually a few quite worth-while men are named, but they are in a painful minority. But we should remember that such a situation is indicative of the mental state of the voters. The situation of the council and mayor ordinarily would be laughable if it were not so tragic. (January, 1933.)

[Middletown] citizens [are] pretty badly discouraged by three years of fighting and brawling in the city administration and by the community's failure to accomplish the things that it should have accomplished. . . . (January, 1933.)

The average taxpayer when this subject [of taxes] is mentioned wears an air of complete dejection. He has been robbed all his life by those in public office and he fears he always will be and that there is nothing to do about it, although there is plenty he could do if he would cease sobbing and get into action. This average taxpayer looks down his nose when he should be looking through the tax spenders' heads to see the greed that's in them; he holds up his hands in lamentation when he should be doubling up his fists to deal stout blows; he bellows after he has been robbed but doesn't even whisper while the robbery is going on. (September, 1933.)

Occasionally Middletown thinks down below this continuous sputter of protest and asks why it should be run by councilmen paid $250 a year, a mayor paid $3,400, a controller paid $2,400, a treasurer paid $720, a city attorney paid $2,100, a street commissioner paid $1,800, and whether such things as these are related to the prevalence of local graft. 87

The cheapest investment Middletown could make right now would be in a mayor worth $20,000 to $25,000 a year and who would be paid that sum. (February, 1933.)

The law as it now stands permits [Middletown] to pay its mayor a salary of little more than $3,000 to run its $60,000,000 corporate business. That leaves the community only with the vague hope that somebody who is capable of carrying on the city's affairs in a businesslike manner could be induced, from patriotic motives, to sacrifice himself for a job and then run the chance of being defeated. And "sacrifice" is the right word. One capable of handling this situation would have to subject himself to mud-slinging, vilification, and misrepresentation by opponents. . . . The people of [Middletown] appear to be pretty tired of what has been going on here. (February, 1933.)

WHO WILL MAKE THE SACRIFICE?

The incessant question that is put up by interested persons when the subject of intolerable civic conditions is brought up is, "Who is going to do anything about it?" And that is wholly puzzling. There never seems to be anything like a concentrated source of authority in behalf of the public. There is nobody working at the job of looking after the people's interests. Thus we know that we should elect a competent mayor of [Middletown] and an intelligent city council, but who, exactly, is going to work unselfishly at the job of nominating and finally selecting men of that kind this year. One who wishes to be mayor will step out and spend his time and money to bring about his nomination and election, but there is no people's lobby to defeat him if he happens to be the wrong sort. One who wishes to be mayor of [Middletown] should not be made mayor. But who is to prevent him from being nominated and elected? . . . Men who are competent cannot afford to take the job, as a rule. (February, 1933.)

In its political life Middletown swings round and round in a vicious circle. Its stereotypes regarding official integrity as well as official remuneration were laid down in an era when being a "public servant" carried far more prestige than it does today. In the simpler sort of community for which American political institutions and ideas of public service were devised, the gap between the remuneration of a mayor or judge and that of the businessman and corporation lawyer usually tended to be far narrower than it is today, and prestige was not rooted so exclusively in money. Today, the rewards of enterprise in business have increased far beyond those of the honest public servant. This has operated to sift a different type of man into municipal office—in Middletown the business hanger-on. Obviously, as the citizen taxpayer goes through Middletown's city hall and sees these officials "at work" with their feet on their desks, the latter strike him as paid about what they are worth. And in an institutional world in which the drive of the taxpayer is to keep costs down, and in which it is a basic part of the code that "Nobody pays more for a thing than it is worth," it does not seem justifiable to raise municipal salaries. And so the self-perpetuating system swings helplessly around in its deeply-worn rut.

Writ large throughout the chapter in the 1925 study on "The Machinery of Government" was the pervading sense that local politics is losing its gusto to Middletown. One got a sense of the smaller city

87 See Middletown, D, 427.
of the 1880's as having been confronted with fewer distracting choices, of its having lived a more neighborly life at a slower tempo, with the business of the city a thing which one belonged to and which belonged to one, a matter of personal comprehension and more active personal discussion and participation. Perhaps this romanticizes what citizenship felt like to the citizen of Middletown in the 1880's. But certainly there can be no doubt about the pervading popular attitude today: apathy, alternating with indignant frustration. Schooled in the tradition that citizenship is a duty and that people get the kind of government they want if they only want it enough; confronted by the obligation to assume through the ballot responsibility for matters increasingly large and complicated and about the technical details of which he knows less and less; with the disparity between management personified in business and in government becoming constantly more obvious; with a sense of civic obligation constantly frustrated by the tawdrieness of this close-up view of democratic institutions in action in a capitalist culture and by the sense of the impotence of the individual voter—these divergent pullings and haulings within his skin, the hard-beset citizen tends to turn his back on the local political mess. And he saves his tension over the resulting split within his personality over his role as citizen by occasional bursts of irritated voting against things and persons.

Middletown is today immune to the small cultural shocks of chronic graft and inefficiency in its public offices. Nothing short of a major breakdown is likely to amplify the steady “knock” in its municipal engine to proportions likely to prompt its citizens to “do something about it.” Its citizens are, after all, primarily concerned with getting a good living, and only very incidentally and instrumentally as occasion arises concerned with citizenship. The relief problems of the depression, along with the example of Federal planning, may have come close to providing shock and stimulus sufficient to instigate fresh scrutiny of the city’s machinery of government. But the frantic resistance of local business leaders to administrative innovation in Washington under the New Deal has carried over to the local scene as a wet blanket over any proposal to change the “fundamentals of the American system of local government.” And the uproar over the efforts to “get” the independent mayor served further to divert attention from fundamental changes, by forcing attention to a personalized devil and away from the conflicts within the institutions themselves.

Early in the depression, as noted in Chapter IV, relief had been a pork barrel on which some politicians and their friends and relatives thrived. A citizens’ committee appointed by the business leaders had developed the commissary plan—not without its business benefits to certain firms “in the hands of the bankers”—and forced a considerable degree of coordination between tax relief and the professional staff of the Social Service Bureau. This enforced control over relief never ceased to irk the politicians. The mayor elected in the fall of 1934 capitalized as a vote-catching device on the South Side the complaints of the poor against the commissary, and pledged himself to do everything in his power to abolish it and turn relief back to orders upon private groceries. Whether this represented merely the common local practice of “making different campaign promises uptown and downtown” is not known. But it is significant that a man, reputed to be “honest,” refused in January, 1935, to assume the office of township trustee after a post-election clash over the commissary with the mayor and the other members of his official family. He gave no reason save his disinclination “to take over an office and have a continuous wrangle with outsiders over how to run it.” An editorial stated in connection with this action on his part that “The law governing the distribution of poor relief by the trustee is very plain and sets forth how he can be removed from office for his failure to cooperate.” A local politician stated unequivocally to the investigator that the man in question would not take office because he feared he would be “framed by the politicians.” One can read various interpretations into this situation. It may represent an honest difference in official opinion as to the worth of the commissary, as noted in the discussion of the abandonment of the commissary in Chapter IV. In 1936 direct relief returned entirely to the township trustee, and the Social Service Bureau withdrew its professional supervision. The net result is that politics appears to have returned in Middletown to “business as usual.”

But if Middletown is apathetic about its local politics, it still rises magnificently to the quadrennial symbolism of national elections. Here, in the more remote field of national public affairs, the irritating discrepancies in, and the fly-specked condition of, political democracy, the will of the people,” “the supremacy of the American two-party system,” and “public service” fade; and the banners of citizenship
retain much of their original glamor. These symbols stiffen one's latent Republican or Democratic biases into sources of personal emotional conviction and consequent support to one's divided civic personality. Every fourth year comes this cleansing opportunity to shake off the mundane aspects of citizenship, to join in the affirmation of a great faith, and to merge oneself in the crusade for a world to be saved.

A significant insight into the political temper of Middletown, as well as a suggestion of the kind of stuff with which any third-party movement has to reckon in American life, is gained from the national presidential vote in Middletown's county shown in Table 46.49 Here one sees the almost complete grip of the two-party system on the imagination of these midland folk. In 1924, 95.4 per cent of the votes were for the Republican and Democratic candidates, 3.3 per cent for La Follette, and only 1.3 per cent for all other candidates; in 1928, 99.5 per cent were for the two old parties; in 1932, 98.1 per cent; and in 1936, 99.2 per cent. There almost literally are no other parties, as shown by the very thin scattering of these minority votes, though it is impossible to know how much tempering with the votes for minority parties occurs in the course of counting the ballots. This last is undoubtedly an insignificant factor in the total, and the heavy concentration on the old familiar parties affords eloquent testimony to the repugnance to innovations in areas involving old allegiances that is so markedly characteristic of Middletown's life. The fact that even the working-class precincts exhibit this same pattern of resistance to political aberrations is consistent with both the conservative, small-farm background of many of these people and with their general apathy toward labor organization and radicalism noted in Chapters II and XII. It is indicative of this last that the state A. F. of L., meeting in Middletown in September, 1935, voted down a resolution endorsing the formation of a labor party by twenty to one. Radical parties are strongly disliked by this culture, as the votes indicate. A veteran labor man, one of the few radicals in Middletown, commented, "A few of us are socialists. Even if we wanted to, as very few do, we would not be communists, because the Communist Party can't be on the state ticket, the trade unionists have no use for it, and you can't get over a lot of other things for labor if you brand yourself as too radical."

The closing of the jaws of public opinion upon radical political parties appears in the passing by the State Legislature of the following act, approved on March 15, 1935:

An act concerning political parties and prohibiting certain political parties from appearing on or having the names of their candidates printed on the ballot used at elections.

SECTION I. Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State, That no political party shall be recognized and given a place on or have the names of its candidates printed on the ballot used at any election which advocates the overthrow, by force or violence, of the local, state or national government, or which advocates, or carries on, a program of sedition or of treason, by radio, speech or press. Any party which is in existence at the time of the passage of this act, or which shall have had a ticket on the ballot one or more times prior to any election, and which does not advocate any of the doctrines the advocacy of which is prohibited by this act, shall insert a plank in its platform that it does not advocate any of the doctrines prohibited by this act. No newly organized political party shall be permitted on or to have the names of its candidates printed on the ballot used at any election until it has filed an affidavit, by its officers, under oath, that it does not advocate the overthrow of local, state or national government by force or violence, and that it is not affiliated in any way with any political party or organization, or subdivision of any organization, which does advocate such a policy by radio, speech or press. The affidavit herein provided for shall be filed with the board of election commissioners of the state or the county or city or town having charge of the printing of the ballot on which such ticket is to appear. The board of election commissioners with which such affidavit is filed shall make such investigations as it may deem necessary to determine the character and nature of the political doctrines of such proposed new party, and if the board is of the opinion that such proposed new party advocates doctrines which are in violation of the provisions of this act, or is affiliated in any way with any political party which advocates such doctrines the board shall not permit such ticket on the ballot.

A member of the State Board of Election Commissioners commented as follows on this act, in a letter to the writers under date of July 29, 1936:

48 The word "government" carries an honorable connotation to Middletown, while the word "politics" has a strong flavor of chicanery associated with it. Middletown tends to assimilate the honorable qualities of "government" to the national scene and to bestow the negative connotations of "politics" upon its local administrations.

49 See Appendix III for this table. The population of Middletown comprised in 1930 69 per cent of the population of the county.
"I presume that it was thought that this Act would prevent the Communist Party from qualifying.

"However, you will notice that if an existing political party states in its platform that it does not advocate any doctrine prohibited by the Act, or if a new political party submits an affidavit of its officers that it does not advocate any such doctrine, it may be entitled to a place upon the ballot. There is no provision by which a party which was in existence at the time of the passage of this Act can be kept off the ballot if it adopts the above required statements in its platform. There is a provision that as to a new political party, even if it submits affidavits of its officers, yet the Board of Election Commissioners after investigation may deny the new party a place on the ballot, if the Board is of the opinion that it does advocate the prohibited doctrines.

"Since the Communist party was in existence at the time of the adoption of this Act, it would seem that it would be entitled to a place upon the ballot if it inserts the required plank in its platform.

"I have no knowledge as to whether such party either has, or proposes to adopt, such a plank."

Business-class Middletown fears any tendency on the part of labor to enter politics, either by massing its vote behind a single one of the older parties or by putting forward a new party. During the summer and fall of 1936, the labor majority in Middletown's population was constantly encouraged to split itself up among all the parties, with no central political philosophy as a class. When, in August, 1936, the Central Labor Union planned to invite in a prominent Roosevelt backer to deliver its Labor Day address, businessmen viewed this with apprehension. A local editorial argued with labor, in terms of its own welfare, as follows:

The [Middletown] Central Labor Union, formerly the [Middletown] Trades Council, always, until now, has prided itself upon keeping out of politics, but apparently it would have as a speaker here, Labor Day, somebody prominent in the Roosevelt-for-President Club—whatever that is. Union labor has advanced itself to its present position by abjuring partisan politics. That has been especially true in [Middletown]. Does it now wish to alienate many of its former friends by dabbling into it? A strip that is easily torn is harder to mend... It looks like local union laborites are being misdirected, but union men here who have the best interests of the cause of unionism at heart would better step their feet upon some of their aspiring leaders with political proclivities, who may prove to be, on close analysis, really job hunters... The advance to better conditions union labor has made has been by using all political parties to their advantage, not by endorsing any one of them.

No precinct within the city of Middletown returned more than 4 per cent of its total votes for Norman Thomas, the Socialist presidential candidate, in 1932, although the highest La Follette vote in any precinct in 1924 climbed to 12 per cent. In 1936 no precinct returned more than nine-tenths of one per cent of its vote for the Socialist and Communist presidential candidates combined; and the precinct showing the largest relative vote for the Union candidate (Lemke) returned less than 2 per cent of its total vote for that candidate. The ingrained Republicanism of Middletown in its national vote, in contrast to its frequently Democratic municipal vote, is reflected in the facts that only two out of the city's thirty precincts went Democratic in their votes for president in 1924; one out of the thirty-two precincts in 1928; and only 13 out of the thirty-two in 1932. Immediately prior to the 1936 election local Republicans were reassuring themselves by recalling that their county has "always been rock-ribbed Republican and it was the only one of the ninety-two counties in the state to go all the way Republican in the Democratic landslide year, 1932." In the 1936 election, despite this record, Middletown's county returned a 57.3 per cent majority for Roosevelt, and Middletown itself 59.1, and twenty-five of the city's thirty-two precincts went Democratic.

If one attempts a rough classification of Middletown's thirty-two precincts by whether they are business-class or working-class neighborhoods, the city's presidential vote in 1936 breaks up as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of neighborhood</th>
<th>No. of precincts</th>
<th>Total no. of votes</th>
<th>Per cent of total</th>
<th>No. of votes for candidate of</th>
<th>Roosevelt-Landon votes for Roosevelt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working class</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9,486</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Largely working class but mixed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3,188</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negro 40</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,953</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Largely business class but mixed</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3,483</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business class</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6,960</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22,817</td>
<td></td>
<td>136</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

40 Negro precincts fall in the "Largely working class but mixed" group. They are here shown separately to indicate how Middletown's Negroes voted.
The clef between business class and working class in their votes for the two major candidates here stands out clearly. The size of the Roosevelt vote even in the business-class neighborhoods suggests, however, an important check on the tendency to speak of the business class as though its members think and act alike on important matters. The following appraisal by a responsible local newspaperman throws further light on the nature of this division among Middletown's business class:

"Big business, of course, was solidly for Landon, but there were many small businessmen for Roosevelt. [A local Democratic city official] thinks small businessmen were 50-50. I think there was a substantial majority for Landon. However, I know of several merchants who were Roosevelt men. Many people in that classification were strong for the Republican state candidates, but favored Roosevelt. The lunchon-club personnel I have encountered at their meetings were almost solidly rabid Republicans, except schoolteachers."

The line of division between the city's big-business industrialists and the merchants and small businessmen corroborates the point made in Chapter XII regarding class lines within Middletown's population.

In the 1934 campaign the press—and then as now “the press” meant the two militantly Republican papers, as there is no other in town save the small Democratic weekly—applied the thumbcrews directly to Middletown in terms of the voter's job and family safety: “A vote for Coolidge is merely a vote for your own safety. You will vote tomorrow for or against your job.” In 1932 the same pressure was ground home repeatedly by such statements as the following from a front-page editorial:

A vote for President Hoover is a vote to retain your job if you have one and for getting a job if you haven't; it is a vote to retain your business if you have one; it is a vote for an opportunity to keep your home or farm if it is in financial distress... Does any employee of the [two leading factories] imagine he could possibly have a job there or that these two factories could operate, except that their workers would have to submit to a wage of a few cents a day, unless [Hoover's high tariff policy is continued]?

The 1936 election witnessed perhaps the strongest effort in the city's history by the local big businessmen (industrialists and bankers) to stampede local opinion in behalf of a single presidential candidate.

41 See Middletown, p. 416.

THE MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT

These men own Middletown's jobs and they largely own Middletown's press; and they made use of both sources of pressure—though not to the point of excluding summaries of President Roosevelt's speeches from the latter. The one important channel of communication which they could not control was the national radio networks, which brought "the other side" before local voters, notably in President Roosevelt's own speeches. The pressure in the factories is reported to have been heavy and direct, as suggested by the following post-election communication from a reliable and informed source:

"Local factories tried to exer a lot of pressure on their employees—so much so that in some cases they overreached themselves and succeeded in rousing the ire of many men and creating additional Democratic votes. The X glass plant practically forced employees to wear Landon buttons. The men wore the buttons at the factory, took them off outside the plant, and voted for Roosevelt. I know two of these workers who became so infuriated that they changed their allegiance even from Roosevelt and voted for more radical candidates.

"The worst offender probably was the local General Motors transmission plant. — , the head of the plant, skated close to violating the law. He carried the campaign openly into the shop and was later reprimanded by his superiors for going too far.

"Landon and higher wages" was the theme of the attack, with the Social Security Act as the principal weapon. Much literature was dis-

43 With both local papers heavily Republican, the customarily "rock-rigid Republican" vote of Middletown in presidential elections is the more understandable. Without minimizing in any respect the landslide nature of the 1936 election and the presence of economic issues antedating the tightening of local newspaper pressure on the voters in the summer and fall of 1936, it is interesting to speculate on what Roosevelt's 59.1 per cent majority might have been had the radio channel been kept open to local voters.

See in this connection n. 5 in Ch. X.

44 Following is the slip inserted in the pay envelopes of local factory workers regarding the Social Security Act:

"To Answer Questions Which Have Been Asked In Connection With Federal and State Taxes On Payrolls, Here Are Some of the Facts:

"A Federal law taxing payrolls was approved by the President on August 14, 1935, and a State law taxing them was approved by the Governor on March 18, 1936. Under these laws this Company has paid a tax on every check you have received since last March.

"Beginning next January the Company will be required by those laws to deduct for taxes approximately 2 per cent (1.9 per cent) from all pay checks. If these laws remain unchanged the amount that must be deducted from your pay check will reach approximately 4 per cent during the next few years. Under
tributed through the factories, stressing deductions from pay under the Act. There was no mention of any benefits ever to accrue to the worker, and there was much talk of the probable folding up of the scheme with loss of money to everyone and of its effects in making pay rises impossible. Apparently many of our workers decided that if the industrialists were so set against the program it must be a bad thing for employers and a good thing for employees—and voted accordingly.

"There are a lot of bewildered business and industrial faces around here. The industrialists, while stepping up production and (some of them) raising wages, are predicting freely a bad crash in the not distant future."

In the press the early campaign appeals were the ones familiar in previous elections, stressing the identity of Republican administrations, high tariffs, and prosperity:

The important thing about this election is to vote against inflation, against having a $30 a week salary with a buying power of $10.

JOBS ARE THE MAIN ISSUE!

Of course a 12-year-old child knows that you can't give jobs to Americans by giving them to foreigners, as we are now doing under the bland beneficence of Mr. Roosevelt's reciprocal trade treaties. . . . We are "selling out" our workmen, our farmers, our manufacturers.

There was much talk of "Landon, the careful Kansan."44 Daniel Webster was quoted in his appeal: "Let us then stand by the Constitution as it is, and by our country as it is." The "courteous and patriotism" of Al Smith, who was anathema to Middletown in 1928, was praised in connection with his denunciation of Roosevelt and the New Dealers as persons who welcome "even a Communist with wire whistlers and a torch in his hand":"But Al Smith could not be for Roosevelt and for America at the same time, so he chose America. A man cannot ride two horses going in opposite directions at once."

When the social-security issue was injected into the campaign, the press dotted its pages with emphatic capitals:

Remember, too, that this so-called "social security law," unless it is amended or repealed, does not make it certain that you will get, if anything these same laws this Company must also pay additional taxes on all money that it spends for payrolls, and these additional taxes will amount to approximately 6 per cent of the money spent for payrolls in the next few years."

44 See the discussion in n. 22 of Ch. XII of the adroitness with which these appeals for Landon were couched in terms dear to the middle-of-the-road mood of Middletown.

THE MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT

thing, in return for what you pay, although if you live long enough you may get something.

You can only be sure that you will have to begin paying this tax, amounting to a substantial reduction in your wages or salary beginning next January 1, and that the payroll tax for the same purpose levied upon your employer is likely to prevent his raising your income, thus leaving you in a financial rut for a long time to come.

When you receive your pay check after January 1 and note that one percent has been deducted without any assurance that you will ever get any of it back, and that the same thing will happen to you every pay day . . . you may not be exactly happy but, cheer up—it soon will be worse. By 1949 your contribution will be three per cent of your salary or wages.

And remember, no tax collector will visit you to get this money. It is required by law that your employer take it out of your pay envelope and turn it over to the tax collector.

Swell change you have of ever getting a "raise" in your pay with your employer's being thus "soaked" by this new tax . . .

You will receive no relief from this burden if Roosevelt is re-elected.

Governor Landon has promised to give relief if he is elected.

The damping down almost to extinction of this flaming party ardor as one turns from national politics to Middletown's election of its own local officials is a social phenomenon that will bear watching. As a local press editorial observes, "Middletown people are Republican or Democratic nationally, but party ties bind them loosely, when at all, in local affairs." Not only does this represent a change from the Middletown of the 1880's, when a man who was a Republican or a Democrat nationally tended to stand staunchly by the same party locally, but it also probably suggests the presence of a profound social change in process in the meaning of political symbols to Middletown.45

As one comes downward from national politics through state politics...
to local politics, the honorific, emotionally weighted symbols become
dimmer and fewer, one votes less as a burning patriot and more as a
person performing a necessary but rather dull routine responsibility.
Platforms become even vaguer, and the same paper quoted above as
clamoring in November, 1932, that grass would grow in the streets if
the Republican party was not elected had commented calmly after the
conventions in June, 1932, that "The chief difference between the Repub-
lican and Democratic state platforms this year is that the Demo-
cratic one is briefer"; and in June, 1934, before the local mayoralty
election, "Nobody would know from observation that a city campaign
presumably is on in Middletown. Almost nobody talks politics and
probably that situation will continue until cooler weather begins."

So far has this blurring of party significance in local issues gone that
today, as in 1924, some of the business leaders in town—numbering
among them many of the very men who stress hardest party differences
in national politics and who oppose impersonal "planning" so bitterly
in Washington—favor the obliteration of party lines in local govern-
ment and the substitution of a city manager. "The truth is," com-
mented a recent editorial characteristic of this point of view, "that
political parties have come to mean little of late years in local elections.
... [Middletown] is strongly Republican in national affairs, but five
times in comparatively recent years she has elected Democratic mayors."
The editorial went on to note the similarity between efficient adminis-
tration in business and in government and pointed out that the city-
manager system means simply that one manages a municipality with
the same absence of irrelevant toot toot beating that exists in a well-run
business. In the fall of 1936 this same editor stated roundly:

I'd like to have the chance, just once before I die, of voting for somebody
to take charge of public business in the city who would be named not
because he was a Democrat or a Republican, but because he knew how to
run the city in a business-like way.

46 See Middletown, p. 427.

47 From the point of view of the strategy of social change one wonders
whether the advocates of planning and administrative efficiency in national
administration might do well to put relatively more of their weight behind the
growth of the city-manager system in the small and medium-sized cities of the
country; for, if Middletown's experience is characteristic, it is here that the
encrusted political symbols appear to be disintegrating fastest and that some
willfulness to take a matter-of-fact, unemotional attitude toward governmental
administration appears most clearly.

There is at least a possibility that by the time another city campaign rolls
around, a commission-manager form of government may be authorized.
... In 1924 [Middletown] had the chance to adopt such a system. At
that time I was bitterly opposed to it and personally campaigned all over
town, in the company of both Democratic and Republican politicians,
against it. We wanted the federal system of government to continue in the
cities. We won by a ratio of something like two to one. And I have had to
apologize since for my attitude. If that question should ever come up again
I'd be found standing rigidly with those who believe politics should have
nothing to do with the conduct of our local affairs.

A key to the understanding of this contrasting intensity of Middlet-
town's adherence to party symbols in national politics and relative dis-
regard of them in local politics may lie in the following: Political
parties have become associated nationally with the earning of people's
living—hence the clamor about "voting to safeguard your job," and
the idea in the heads of many Middletown businessmen concerning the
"unsoundness" of the Democratic party; whereas local politics have
traditionally concerned only the spending of income, and, at that, only
of that small fraction of one's income that goes into taxes. The typical
central issue in Middletown's local campaigns is not "assuring the
continuance of prosperity" but "economy," "keeping taxes down." In
an economy which has inherited its system of ideas from a pre-indus-
trial-revolution world of "scarcity," and which today still sees its wel-
fare as dependent only upon the productive side of its economic equa-
tion, it is natural that national politics should thus center around ques-
tions of the significance of parties and candidates for one's ability to
earn dollars. And it is likewise natural that, with such crucial things as
"tariffs" and "prosperity" lying outside the sphere of influence of
Middletown's mayor and councilmen, theirs should be the lesser task
of helping the taxpayer to save pennies.

46 It is difficult to overstate the power of the popular stereotype as to what
the "tax rate" should be in the local voter's mind. Local taxes are compact
and aggregated into a single annual figure. The taxpayer tends to think not of
positive things for his local government to do, but rather to feel that the im-
portant thing is to hold the tax rate down. The fact that it is a rate and not a total
budget disguises shifts in the latter as assessed valuations change. The rate is the
crucial thing to him. Middletown feels that the combined local rate is "right"
when it is under $3.00 and protests loudly when it goes above that. For years
the rate has run mainly between $2.50 and $3.00; 1891, $2.86; 1904, $3.22;
1920, $3.23; 1920, $2.21; 1921, $2.66; 1922, $2.70; 1923, $2.70; 1924, $3.66;
1925, $3.58; 1926, $2.45; 1927, $2.60; 1928, $2.68; 1929, $2.94; 1930, $2.94;
1931, $2.73; 1932, $3.07; 1933, $3.39; 1934, $3.10.
THE MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT 367

"us" and is playing against "us." There is the disappointment and resentment of insiders in a profitable and comfortable venture suddenly deprived of the margin of advantage so long occupied as to have come to appear "normal and just." Their natural reaction is to seek to "turn out the government" and to restore the status quo ante in Washington. On the other hand, conversations with Middletown's workers in June, 1935, indicated that events in Washington following March, 1933, have kindled the first faint awareness among some of them that a "government," instead of being simply a miscellaneous alloy of everybody in general, may actually be able to do things for "us," even if needed is against "them." There are plenty of indications of working-class disappointment and disgust over such things as the collapse of collective bargaining under N.R.A.; but, nevertheless, the initiative in providing relief and some measure of social security in chronically exposed areas of working-class life is coming in tangible form from Washington; and some of Middletown's workers are contrasting such concrete facts with the clamor of local business leaders that such Federal spending cease. In this situation, the sprawled inertness of Middletown working-class opinion—as over against the more vocal and coherent opinion of the business class—may conceivably take shape slowly in a self-conscious sharpening of class lines. But neither class morale, sources of information, nor personal leadership for such a development is apparent at present among Middletown's working class. Much depends upon whether "good times" return in as beguiling a form as they were in the 1920's. If they do, the deeper pattern of political loyalty to the old symbols, plus the willingness of these individual working-class atoms to dance to any tune that will give them an automobile and "show them a good time," will transform their momentary position in the political limelight under the New Deal in the election of 1936 into only a vaguely remembered benchmark. For today, as in 1924, the Middletown voter is not a political self-starter, and Elihu Root's advice, widely heralded in Middletown at the time of the 1924 election, still applies: "All you have got to do is to wake them up, have someone take the head of the crowd and march them. Tell them where to go, whether Democrats or Republicans, I do not care . . . and the organizers . . . will welcome them and set them to work." 50

50 See Middletown, p. 426.
As was noted in connection with the spending of leisure, Middletown, like the rest of America, has paid little attention to the types of activity that thrive best under centralized and those that thrive best under diffused organization. The tradition that everything possible should be left to the initiative and diffused control of individuals is unequivocal. At a certain point the culture has frozen the definition of the relative spheres of centralized and of more diffused authorities, as in the Federal Constitution. The dominant business section of the culture has likewise inherited a sacred tradition of "individual initiative," "free competition," and "the small businessman" which is officially braced strongly against all forms of centralization: though, under cover of this orthodoxy, there has for three generations been an increasing departure nationally in the direction of greater centralization in such matters as "trusts," "holding companies," "price fixing," "administered prices," and the other familiar accompaniments of centralized economic control. But, in general, Middletown accepts the fact that the individual does nearly everything for himself, while the city, State, and Federal governments care for only a scattering of commonplace things; and people in general do not stop to question this traditional allocation of functions, or whether it actually operates as it is theoretically supposed to operate.

Middletown businessmen look with apprehension upon the enlargement of the scope of Federal administrative powers since 1933. Their ingrained philosophy of government is that where things cannot be left to the individual citizen they should be cared for as isolated problems by local governmental units wherever possible. Otherwise "things will get out of hand." As over against Federal relief, Middletown urges, in the words of a local editorial, "Let's take care of our own." No good, these people feel, can come from a system that scrambles up jurisdictions and substitutes remote central administration for local responsibility. "Other people," so runs the argument, "can never spend our money as wisely and economically as we can." Thus, in the midst of the scramble for Federal funds, Middletown could look upon the money it managed to get from Washington as but a partial repayment for taxes drained from the state by a bloated and misguided Federal government. This point of view was expressed in the following editorial in 1936:

"Think the good ole Federal gov'ment has been mighty liberal in its spending of money on [our state]? Then ponder how liberal we people in

this state] have been with the good ole gov'ment. Last year taxpayers of [this state] contributed more than $68,000,000 to the Federal funds and in return received less than $42,000,000. In other words our own taxpayers could have done for the state what the Federal government did and had $26,000,000 remaining in the state's "kitty." The money contributed by the citizens of [our state] to Washington was derived largely from individual income taxes, corporation taxes and taxes on beer and distilled spirits. The money returned was distributed among 22 kinds of projects.

It is for this reason it is important for any given community to "git the gittin's good," and not because it necessarily approves all of the vast expenditures that are being made. If we are not permitted to spend all of our own money, then it appears necessary to grab as much of it as possible and let it go at that until such time as the spending orgy is officially ended.

The time is not so far past when some Middletown citizens who had no children protested their enforced payment of taxes to support expensive schools for other people's children. Today many local citizens are scandalized by the thought that the Federal government is using the money of Middletown people to do things for people in other communities, states, and remote corners of the nation. Local thought resists stubbornly the proposition that more and more problems are part of a widespread institutional system and may not be coped with successfully by the individual citizen or, at most, by the local community. Yet as Middletown has learned to grasp eagerly at outside funds as an aid in meeting its relief problem, it has unconsciously been breaching the psychological walls that mark off its life, its administrative boundaries, and its fiscal problems from those of the wider culture. In this respect the depression has involved a significant move in the direction of social change in this area of localism and individual competence.

At yet another point Middletown has been questioning the proper sphere of governmental activity. Since 1925, the issue of the public ownership of Middletown's local utilities has arisen on two occasions. Its outcome epitomizes some of the deeper biases of Middletown's culture, including the differential control by interested business and by "the public" over matters that lie in the limbo of "the public interest," and the panicky popular skepticism as regards anything run by Middletown's city government. The mayor who was swept into office in 1930 by a surprise victory had campaigned on a pledge of municipal own-
ership of local public utilities, but nothing came of this plank in his platform in the hurly-burly of the succeeding five years. Meanwhile, a small Public Ownership League, composed of socially and economically unimportant people and sponsored by a former Ku Klux Klan organizer, was formed and began to agitate for the public ownership of the water, gas, and electric plants. When the movement reached the point where popular support had resulted in the scheduling of a special vote on the issue in the spring of 1934, the local utilities opened fire. Large-space newspaper advertisements poured away at the voters:

Do you know that it will cost the people over $10,000,000 to buy the utilities in [Middletown]?

The public utilities are [Middletown's] biggest single taxpayer. On election day vote “No” on the scheme to load the city with this huge debt.

107 employees anxious to serve you. We work, live, and spend our dollars in [Middletown]. Thirty of us own our homes here and we want to remain here. Our company is more than meters, mains, and boilers. It is human.

The local press, itself not without an obvious advertising stake in the continued private ownership of industries characterized by such liberal spending for “public relations,” had epitomized Middletown’s deep skepticism as regards the extension of public administration when it had repeatedly said:

The history of such things [as the municipal ownership of utilities] is that neither a city, state nor national government is able to operate a utility as economically as a private concern can do it, and the result when such attempts have been made almost invariably has been waste and added expense to the citizens. . . . It has been proved so many hundred times, 100, that politics and public ownership of public utilities do not mix, that the very suggestion that a city go into this kind of business is frightening. Let the shoemaker stick to his last.

Most municipal experiments in the operation of public utilities have been failures and most of them will continue to be until public ownership and operation can be divorced from politics.10

The Machinery of Government 371

Looking backward down the years at some of the city administrations Middletown has had, a thinking person is inclined to hesitate before jumping body and boots into municipal ownership of public utilities. Politicians are congenitally unadapted to the management of important business, especially business of so highly technical a kind as that of the public utilities. As a rule they cannot even manage their own private business successfully. Now this is not an argument against the public ownership of utilities—merely a statement of the [Middletown] situation. If [Middletown] had the city management form of government . . . or, if [Middletown’s] population were business-minded rather than political-minded, then public ownership would have a better chance of success than it would have under the present conditions.

To arguments such as these the Public Ownership League rejoined:

[Middletown] is surrounded by towns such as [naming fourteen near-by cities and towns], all told 188 towns and cities in [this state] that are operating their own utilities at a great profit. A—— [a city twenty miles distant] has cleared more than $250,000 on their electric light plant for years, and averaged $68,000 clear each year on their water company. R—— [another city near by] clears about $300,000 each year. And all of these plants have lower rates than [Middletown] under private ownership.

About $600,000 per year, in profit, in our three utilities is sent to Chicago and New York to pay dividends on heavily watered stock and to pay unjust, unfair, and high salaries to officials not earning their money. How long will this continue? Just as long as we permit it.

But a few days before the election the whole business was comfortably disposed of by a permanent injunction against the election, secured by the local utilities from the Superior Court, “on the theory,” as summarized in the press, “that the electrical and gas companies here have vested rights in franchises that remove them from being subject to the municipal ownership law in [this state].” 11 And so well have the note landing the saving to taxpayers in an adjacent city of Middletown’s size through municipal ownership of local utilities:

“[Middletown’s] civil city tax rate for 1937, as proposed, is $1.05; that of A——, a city of comparable size, is 22 cents and of this 17 cents is for retirement of bonds and payment of interest. But for old indebtedness, A—— would be a taxless town in 1937, according to the Bulletin there. The city government of A—— has been operated without a general tax fund levy during the last four years. Reason? Profits from the municipal light and power plant.”

10 On the eve of the special election on the utilities question and prior to the granting of the injunction, the question was put to the editor of one of Middletown’s daily papers: “How does the town stand on the question?” He replied, “My
agencies of public opinion done their work and so strong is the stench of New Deal interference with private business in the nostrils of Middletown's leading businessmen, that most of the latter have greeted the saving action of the court as a relief from further possible political trouble.

For over all Middletown's sins of political omission and commission rests the comforting conviction: "But time will cure all things. "Whatever things are good" will all come in time, and meanwhile the "middle-of-the-road" policy is best. The outlook of a Spengler that anticipates "the decline of the west" is foreign to the mood of Christian, American Middletown. So Middletown jogs along in its civic affairs, riding uneasily with one foot on the back of each of the ill-gaited horses of Democratic Symbol and Urgent Reality. As an observer watches team and rider, questions inevitably arise as to how long the two horses will continue within leg-stretch of each other, how rapid the pace of change must become and how obvious the disparity needs be between symbols and reality before Middletown may cease to believe in inevitable progress—and what may happen then within the lives of these busy, hopeful people?

guess is the vote would be about half and half. Probably the advocates of municipal ownership would have won a month ago. But the companies have been handing out some powerful propaganda." (From "Middletown—Ten Years After," Business Week, June 2, 1934.)

CHAPTER X

Getting Information: The Press

"It seems to me the newspapers should have brought this [referring to a local civic problem brought before Middletown in a letter to the editor] up a long time ago, for after all that is the duty of the newspapers... I would like to see someone start a campaign for absolute honesty and open dealing with problems... I could ask questions all night to which I can get no answer; and which should be cleared up. I think this is the job of the newspapers. It has to be done by someone not dependent on a job for a living." (Communication in the "Letters to the Editor" column of Middletown's afternoon paper, 1933.)

"Mr. ——, some day you may need money from my bank to carry on your business, and your credit is not so good that you can afford to tell me what to do about the Community Fund." (Reported remark by a Middletown banker to a critic of his actions in connection with the Community Fund.)

"USE OF NEWSPAPERS REFLECTS IN SALES"

"One of the oldest users of newspaper advertising, SSS Tonic, continued to advertise in the newspapers during the depression, and their advertising manager reports that their faith was fully justified in that, with the turn in conditions, their 1934 sales to date show an immediate jump of 34 per cent and are still climbing... The SSS formula has been in use for more than 100 years, and has been nationally advertised, almost exclusively, in newspapers for the past 68 years." (News item in Middletown paper, 1934.)

"The average voter does not know and he does not even suspect what is going on. That is pathetic, but it is true. [Then followed the statement that the press is helpless] because you can't get affidavits." (Editorial comment on corruption in politics in Middletown's afternoon paper, 1933.)

"The [Middletown morning paper] is still struggling against its mixed emotions. One minute it overcomes its artificial instinct to say everything is all right and hustles loose with the truth, and then in its next subsides into docility. The [paper] has real newspaper writers of ability... if these men and women were given free rein to paint the picture as they see it.