

POLITICS AND THE POST-OFFICE

EDITORIAL BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

DO the American people wish the Post-Office Department to be run as a great political machine in the interests of that faction of the dominant party which at the moment controls the National patronage, or do they wish it to be run as a great business corporation in the interest of the people as a whole? This is a question which should receive very serious consideration at the present time; for at the present time, as hardly ever before in its history, the Post-Office Department, together with most other Federal departments, is being used primarily as a political machine to perpetuate the control, within the party, of the present forces dominating the party in power.

It is very difficult to get clear and unequivocal proof, such as would be satisfactory in a court of law, of statements like the above. In practice, of course, there is not a single honest man who at the moment is engaged in practical politics who does not know that this statement is the exact truth moderately expressed. But as to one State we happen to have proof that cannot be controverted. Recently Presidential preferential primaries were held in Oklahoma. The Federal office-holders took the lead in endeavoring to prevent—as it proved, unsuccessfully—the expression of the genuine preference of the Republican voters at the primaries. I have before me as I write the original of a letter sent to Mr. Figley, the postmaster at Hastings, Oklahoma, by Mr. James Harris, the Chairman of the Republican State Committee. The envelope is marked “personal,” together with a memorandum to return it after five days to the Harris Brothers. The letter itself runs as follows:

Dear Sir:

I am in receipt of the following letter from the Department:

“The commission of Newton S. Figley, Postmaster at Hastings, Oklahoma, will expire February 28, 1912. When last inspected, this office did not appear to be in a satisfactory condition, and unless the postmaster can be relied upon to raise the service to a higher standard of efficiency it is believed that he should not be reappointed. The Department

will be pleased to receive as promptly as possible an expression of your views as to what action in this case will be for the best interests of the service.”

I hope you have your office in first-class condition and will continue to have it so.

If you will bring in a delegation to the State and District Conventions instructed for Taft and Jim Harris, I will see that you are reappointed.

With best wishes, I am

Very truly,

(Signed) J. A. HARRIS, Chairman.

Mr. J. E. Dyche, of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, who forwarded the letter to me, writes in an entirely friendly spirit about Mr. Harris, and says that Mr. Harris has admitted to him that the letter is genuine, and that, moreover, he knows Mr. Harris's signature. He gives me the names of various other Federal employees whom it was attempted to influence in similar fashion, and mentions that Mr. Figley is a man of large family and no capital, and dependent upon the income from the office for a living. Mr. Figley's real sympathy was with the Progressive movement, but on account of his financial condition and the fact that his term of office was to expire on the 28th of February he was obliged to submit to the dictation of the managers of the party; so he promised to do what he could.

The “recall” of the ten nominations for post-offices in North Carolina, for avowedly political reasons, and the case of the Bessemer, Alabama, post-office, instanced by Senator Bristow, are other cases in point.

Congressman George W. Norris, of Nebraska, has rendered a real and great public service by introducing at this particular time a bill to take the Post-Office Department as completely out of politics as the Civil Service Commission is now. Various plans have been proposed to achieve this purpose; that of Mr. Norris seems admirably designed for the end in view. Congressman Norris has taken the lead in a movement of prime importance—one in the interest of good government administration and in the interest of decent politics and in the interest of the genuine rule of the people.