

Political Ruckus Costs a Winsted Official His Job

By DEBRA A. ALEKSINAS

WINSTED—Capping a political storm that has generated controversy since the Nov. 5 election, the Board of Selectmen voted 4 to 3 Monday to go ahead with plans to fire town manager Wayne F. Dove, despite nearly three hours of emotionally charged debate from residents, who mainly backed Mr. Dove.

Following the vote—and amid fiery outbursts from the audience of about 140 residents who charged some selectmen with conducting "back-room politics," and with basing their vote on a prior "cut deal"—selectmen also voted to suspend Mr. Dove immediately and appointed town clerk William T. Riska as acting town manager.

The town charter requires that selectmen hold a public hearing on Mr. Dove's firing. Selectmen, who set this for Dec. 3, noted Monday, however, that they had no intention of altering their decision.

Roughly Two Weeks

In place roughly two weeks, the newly appointed board, with a Democratic majority, has managed to generate substantial political uproar, centered on the unexpected and controversial appointment of Republican William H. McCabe as Mayor.

"This is disgusting, despicable...and dastardly. We are the laughing stock of the state. This is not government of the people, it is government stuck to the people," commented resident Ruth Wheeler.

"You can throw me out of here, Bill McCabe, but you've changed from a Dr. Jekyll to a Mr. Hyde," charged former Democratic Mayor Nancy Eisenlohr, a

member of the town's Planning and Zoning Board. "I had not heard any rumblings prior to election" regarding problems with the town manager's job performance, added Ms. Eisenlohr, echoing the sentiments of many who spoke at the forum.

Mr. Dove, 40, who waived the right to hold the meeting in executive session, left the meeting after the vote was taken without making a public statement about the firing. He could not be reached for further comment. A Winsted native, Mr. Dove was chosen town manager last December, replacing David Battistoni, who resigned under pressure from the board.

Weeks of Controversy

Monday's meeting came after several weeks of controversy that began only hours after the election. Mr. McCabe, an incumbent selectman, was named Mayor the following morning in a 4-to-0 vote, despite the fact that Democrats had won a 5-to-2 advantage on the board, and amid highly publicized charges there there was some sort of political deal.

The 10 a.m. vote on Mr. McCabe's appointment became the focus of political bickering after two of the six newly elected board members, Democrats Walter D. Miller and Brian W. Sullivan,

walked out of the meeting. They said a vote on the Mayor's appointment should not be taken until a recount in the race between two selectman candidates—Democrat John F. Gauger Jr. and Republican Timothy Muran, who lost to Mr. Gauger by just 12 votes.

Vote Was Held

The vote was held anyway and selectmen who backed Mayor McCabe included former Democratic Mayor James Pettit, who ran as an unaffiliated candidate, Mr. McCabe, Republican Francis J. O'Neill and Democrat Nancy P. Habbal. Mr. Gauger was reportedly out of town on business.

Mr. Miller and Mr. Sullivan later charged that the meeting was illegal, but Mayor McCabe said that under the town charter, the board is required to elect a new Mayor within 24 hours of the election. Town attorney Mark Svonkin has since ruled that the vote was valid and the meeting legal.

About a week after the vote, Winsted's newly elected Mayor privately asked Mr. Dove to step down from his post as town manager because, according to Mr. McCabe, he did not have the majority backing of the board. Mr. Dove requested that the issue be discussed openly at Monday's Board of Select-

Continued on Page Thirteen