

ALD. MORGAN ON REFORM OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

The Des Moines Commission Plan Described—The Board of Control Plan—Defects of the System Which Obtains in This City.

To the Editor of The Advertiser:

As there has been considerable interest taken lately in municipal government reform, I consider it an opportunity to explain some of the methods proposed.

The two most prominently brought to the public notice are government by commission and the board of control. I will first give a general outline of the history of government by commission. This will be followed by a brief description of the board of control method. Then I will endeavor to point out the advantages and disadvantages of these different systems, so that our citizens will be able to intelligently follow the discussions on this subject, and to be in a better position to judge of the advisability of accepting one of these new plans, or working out from these systems in use, one that will be adapted to our needs here in London.

It is astonishing that government by commission, though used for years in commercial undertakings, has only quite recently been used by municipalities, and then commenced, you might say, by accident. It originated in the city of Galveston, Texas, in 1900, when that city was partially destroyed by flood, and everything was prostrated. It necessitated, for a time the protection of military forces from the state. As the troops were withdrawn a commission of representative citizens was appointed by the governor of the state to have charge of the rehabilitation of the stricken city. So effectively did these commissioners discharge their duties that the citizens would not consider a return to the inefficiency and futile wranglings of former days. Legislative authority was accordingly obtained to reorganize the city under a commission of five members to be elected by popular vote.

The new governing body acted substantially as does the directorate of a bank or a manufacturing or commercial corporation, dispatching business on its merits without appeals to prejudice or resorts to the scheming and wire-pulling of conventional municipal politics.

The people of Galveston were pleased, and the citizens of the neighboring city of Houston took note of the new order of things, and were quick to emulate their example, and in 1903 adopted a like charter, with excellent results.

When the National Municipal League assembled in Chicago in 1904, knowledge of the successful operation of the new plan had become general, and many cities availed themselves of the decided advantage of the new method. By 1907 six other cities had fallen into line, and these were followed by six more cities. These were all southern cities, but a system which had worked such wonders in municipal government could not escape the attention of the more northern cities and today 69 cities have adopted, or expressed a desire to adopt, this system.

We in Canada cannot realize what a bondage many of the so-called Democratic cities of the United States are under. The nominations of municipal candidates under the control of the two political parties, and these are in most cases controlled by the political machines, so that it was necessary for a candidate to be brought forward by one of these machines. It is easy to understand the amount of opposition that would be brought forward to keep another system out which would be out of their control, so that there would be many cities trying to emulate the example of Galveston, but were unable to overcome the difficulties. Also the plan was new, and few plans at the beginning are perfect. It takes practice and use to get any system to its best working value.

Before all the progress, already noted in Texas had been accomplished, the city of Des Moines, Iowa, was at work upon the problem of municipal reform, but had been repeatedly defeated by those in control and opposed to reform, but the people, though discouraged, fought on, and as Galveston had now pointed the way, establishing what is known as the commission system and demonstrating its remarkable adaptation to that city's condition. Much that was essential in the Galveston charter, but not quite enough for general application. There Des Moines found her cue, and through the interest of some of her public-spirited citizens it was brought before the organization of businessmen called the Commercial Club. Meetings were held, and a standing committee of 200 citizens was named. A sub-committee was appointed to draft a new form of government for the city with the understanding that the Gal-

veston charter was to be broadly followed as a model. The first charter met with defeat by the State Legislature, but they were ultimately successful, with a more radical plan, and one which met with the approval of the public opinion. There were many other plans brought forward, which were compromises with the old system, while they gave a measure of reform, they would not have been able to have accomplished what the Des Moines plan has done.

General View of the Des Moines Plan.

Under this plan of municipal government the business of the city is conducted by five administrative departments, designated as follows:

1. Department of public affairs.
2. Department of accounts and finances.
3. Department of public safety.
4. Department of streets and public improvements.
5. Department of parks and public property.

The department of public affairs is superior to the four other departments in both authority and compensation. It is in charge of the mayor, elected by the people as such, and given general supervision over the four co-ordinate working departments. The mayor is ex-officio a member, and presides over the council composed of the head of the five departments, and has a vote, but no veto. He is relieved of practically all merely routine duties, save those necessarily arising from his position as official head and mouthpiece of the city, giving him ample time and opportunity for the important labor of co-operation with and supervision over the labor of his four associates. In cities, 25,000 to 40,000, the mayor's salary is \$2,500; the four councilmen \$1,800 each. This small, directly responsible administrative body, resembling the board of directors of a private corporation, takes the place of the mayor, council, and various boards among which the powers and duties pertaining to municipal administration have been divided in the past. All other officers and employees of the city are selected by the council.

The Des Moines plan provides for a double election. At the primary election any citizen may become a candidate for mayor or councilman without consulting any committee or submitting to any requirements, save that of a petition signed by at least 25 qualified voters, attesting to his good moral character and fitness for office. The two candidates receiving the highest votes for mayor and the eight candidates receiving the highest number of votes for councilman are declared to be the nominees, and these ten names and no others are printed on the ballots for the second and final election, held two weeks later, at which the mayor and four councilmen are elected. Immediately taking charge of the city government, the new council assigns the four unallotted councilmen to their several departments, and defines the powers and duties of each, subject, however, to change hereafter. It appears that the public service would be benefited thereby. The organization is purposely made elastic, the council being also empowered to assign particular officers and employees to one or more of the departments or to require that they perform duties in two or more departments.

The merit system is given the largest practical application in the selection of officers and employees. The fullest publicity as to campaign expenses is required, both the source and manner of expenditure to be reported under oath.

Every ordinance or resolution appropriating money or ordering any street improvements or sewer or making any contract or granting any franchise must be complete in its final form and remain on file with the city clerk for public inspection at least one week before its final passage or adoption.

To enable the citizens to prevent the council from fastening objectionable legislation upon the city, provision is made whereby upon protest of 25 per cent of the numbers of electors voting for mayor at the last preceding general election, the council must either reconsider and repeal the ordinance objected to or submit it to a vote of the people for acceptance or rejection.

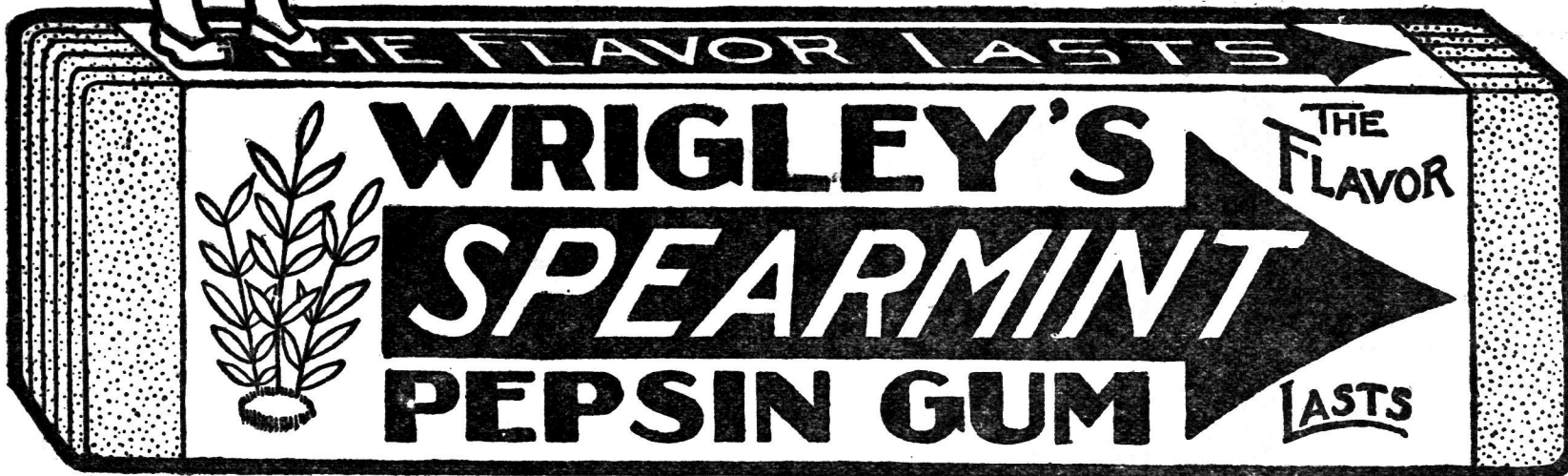
To secure public sentiment in favor of a specific legislation, the city charter requires that upon petition of 25 per cent of the number of electors voting for mayor at the last regular election, any proposed ordinance must either be passed without alteration by the council or submitted to the people at a general or special election for adoption or rejection as law; a ten per cent petition being sufficient to secure submission at a regular election.

To insure good service from the council and to enable the city to purge that body of the membership therein of unworthy persons, provision is made whereby upon a 25 per cent petition any mayor or councilman may be compelled to face a special election upon the question of his continuance in office, his name going on the ballot as a matter of course, and candidates against him by a 10 per cent petition. The highest vote electing for the remainder of the term.

The Board of Control, as adopted by the city of Toronto, is as follows:

The city elects twenty aldermen, divided up from the different wards. A mayor and four controllers are elected by the city at large. The mayor and controllers constitute the board of control, to which is intrusted the administrative part of city government. The mayor, controllers and aldermen together constitute the city council of 25 members, the duties of which are largely legislative.

The board of control meets nearly every day, and its duties are to carry out the orders of the larger body to whom it must report, and which has authority to revise or reverse the board's recommendations. It (the board) cannot amend. It must ac-



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cept or reject. The council cannot order the expenditure or payment of money or make an appointment that has not been recommended by the board except by a two-thirds vote. All heads of departments and officials are under the direction of the board.

This method is much like a combination of our present system and the commission. The name "Board of Control" is misleading. It is really a board, or commission, controlled by the council, which is a part of our present method, which is a part of the council controlled by the council. It does not correct or alleviate our present trouble, which is one body controlling or overriding another body. The controlled body being the one that has gone into the details and investigated thoroughly, while the controlling body has only a superficial knowledge, or, perhaps, none at all.

This will always create discord and dissatisfaction. To get satisfactory results there must be a responsible head, and all departments held responsible for their work to this head. To my view there is no use whatever trying to defend our present method. There is no unity in it, and it is suitable only for small towns or villages, and not for a place the size of London. You may have repeated efforts at reform similar to last and other years, and elect whom you like, but unless you change the whole system and put it on an up-to-date, progressive method, you may expect no permanently good. Our city now has about 12 or 15 different governing bodies, many entirely independent of all the others, while some are just the opposite, being controlled by other foreign bodies, a mix-up which no commercial enterprise could survive.

The board of control is a large improvement on our present method, while the government by commission is just as great an improvement on the board of control. The objection raised most against commission is that of putting too much power in the hands of a few men. The utter failure of the old way should not entitle a new one to our adherence simply because it offers a change. To many, the government of a city by a single body, few in numbers, would seem autocratic, but the system is really more democratic than what we now have, by concentrating the work and responsibility in the hands of five men, paying them reasonable compensatory salaries, requiring them to devote their time exclusively to the publication of the city, and making them responsible for results in their several departments.

The commission system, first of all, informs the citizens just where they must look for attention on any particular matter. The fear that the five members would not feel their responsibility is easily answered by persons familiar with large and successful undertakings. Such persons know how invariably direct responsibility sobers and steadies him upon whom it rests. The plan has worked out better in practice than its most ardent friends expected. By the initiative and referendum, protest and recall, it puts the people in as full control of the management of municipal affairs as human ingenuity could do, providing direct, simple and easily operated instrumentalities for compelling the public representatives to respect the wishes of the people, both departments of the city hall. What

affirmatively and negatively, or submit to the penalty of involuntary retirement at the behests of the people, in ways and means for the enforcement of the extraordinary decree within easy access. The people are to nominate and elect these five members who are to represent them and be fully responsible to them. The people are given power to initiate desired legislation, which these five men fail to pass and to compel its enactment, or themselves enact it. They may recall any or all of these servants if recalcitrant in their duty. These few shining powers are ample so far as establishing and maintaining a democratic regime are concerned, and are in decided contrast to the difficulties of our present system, where it is difficult to place responsibility, and there is no call or power of the people after election.

The objects of the double elections are to prevent private interests taking advantage by bringing out a large number of candidates and then concentrating their efforts on a few, among a larger number of candidates, and thus rule the city through a skillfully-handled minority of voters. Cities are often humiliated and degraded by constant intermeddling in the affairs of bodies entirely foreign to them. In the primary election there may be 30 or 40 candidates and half a dozen for mayor. This would be narrowed down for the final election to two candidates for mayor and ten for commissioners, and from these the people would select their representatives.

In our own system there is so much delay in getting anything done; it is referred to one body then back, and sometimes this is again repeated, then the delays getting bylaws through. This is obviated in the commission. They meet nearly every day as one body, and any citizen that applies for anything can be informed at once, "yes or no," and the reasons why. Petitions are now often passed on from one body to another and back again till the citizen rarely knows where he is at.

Every act of the five members of the council from the moment they become candidates until they retire from office is performed in the broad light of public observation. They must justify their conduct to the public. Their camp expenses and the sources from which the money was obtained. After their election the requirements become very specific. Every meeting must be open to the public. The framers of Des Moines' plan were determined that nothing could be done in a corner. The publicity measures are intended to establish public control of every conceivable contingency and the prohibition of outlays of money without a week's delay in each case, shows to what extent they were willing to go to accomplish this end.

In our own city we have a deplorable state of affairs, which is difficult to describe. One committee taking a decided stand against another committee; aldermen voting against even their own principles simply to carry out some private grudge, or working out their own hobby, and utterly disregarding the wishes of the people; the council ignoring recommendations of their own engineers; a lack of harmony among the different departments of the city hall. What

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Full particulars gladly furnished at city office, 406 Richmond Street, Phone 205.

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Depart for the east—12:14 a.m., 3:43 a.m., 7:30 a.m., 9:00 a.m., 11:40 a.m., 3:00 p.m., 4:25 p.m., 6:55 p.m., 10:30 p.m.	
Depart for the west—3:55 a.m., 7:40 a.m., 11:15 a.m., 11:43 a.m., 1:40 p.m., 8:15 p.m.	
LONDON AND WINDSOR.	
Arrive—10:25 a.m., 4:00 p.m., 6:50 p.m., 11:05 p.m.	
Depart—6:35 a.m., 11:35 a.m., 2:05 p.m., 8:10 p.m.	
STRAITFORD BRANCH.	
Arrive—7:25 a.m., 11:15 a.m., 1:35 p.m., 6:45 p.m., 11:25 p.m.	
Depart—6:00 a.m., 10:25 a.m., 2:45 p.m., 4:55 p.m.	
LONDON, HURON AND BRUCE.	
Arrive—10:00 a.m., 6:10 p.m.	
Depart—8:30 a.m., 4:40 p.m.	
Trains marked * run daily. Those not marked daily, except Sunday.	
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Arrive from the east—11:25 a.m., 15:30 p.m., 7:30 p.m., 10:35 p.m.	
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Depart for the east—4:40 a.m., 17:45 a.m., 12:45 p.m., 5:35 p.m.	
Depart for the west—10:00 p.m., 11:33 a.m., 17:10 p.m., 11:50 p.m.	
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PERE MARQUETTE RAILWAY.	
Depart—5:05, 6:02, 8:45 a.m., 1:20, 2:30, 1:45, 5:05, 7:00, 8:35 p.m.	
Arrive—8:45, 11:25 a.m., 1:40, 4:30, 6:00, 8:05, 9:45, 11:40, 12:30 p.m.	
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