

Philadelphia Has a New Charter

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1854, 1886, 1919. These three dates stand out conspicuously in the history of Philadelphia's Municipal Government. In 1854 the Legislature consolidated the old City of Philadelphia (as laid out by William Penn) and the County and made them one geographically, but not governmentally. That is a task still to be done. In 1885 the Bullitt bill was passed, accomplishing administrative reforms of a far-reaching character and lasting importance. And now we have another Charter giving the city a modern legislative body, and embodying many other improvements of great present and future usefulness.

Thirty-one years elapsed between the first and second. Thirty-four between the second and third. Will another equally long period elapse between the present and the next step forward? I do not think so, for the spirit of progress is abroad in the city and the urge of modern condi-

tions is upon us—but these dates temper one's prophecy. Philadelphia does not change her methods and practices with feverish haste, but her changes usually last and there is a minimum of see-saw in her governmental development.

The big achievement of the new Charter—which by the way is a concise document of 23282 words and a model of admirable draughtsmanship—is the small Council of approximately 21 in place of the great double chambered Council of 48 Select Councilmen—select in title only—and 98 Common Councilmen, a total of 146 making it the largest Municipal Council in the country, if not in the world. This new body, the members of which are to receive a living wage in the shape of an annual salary of \$5000 (the present Councilmen serve without pay—from the city) is to be elected every four years. The State Senatorial districts have been made the basis of representation. There are eight of these and **only eight** under the present constitution and they are as nearly homogeneous and compact as it is possible to make political sub-divisions.

We will have a South Philadelphia district; a West Philadelphia one; a Northeastern district; a Central district; a Germantown district and so on through the list with substantially similar needs and composition. There will be at least one Councilman for each district and one additional Councilman for each 20,000 assessed voters. It is because of this proviso that I spoke of "approximately 21", because a careful revision of the list of assessed voters may bring the number down to 18 or 19. So as to keep the Council small, and as a recognition of coming events, the Charter contains an interesting provision that "if at any time hereafter the women of the Commonwealth shall be given the right to vote, the unit of representation shall be 40,000 assessed voters instead of 20,000, so that the Council shall continue to be composed of twenty-one members."

One of the arguments most frequently urged for a small, compact municipal legislature has been the facilities it affords the voter to understand his government and run it directly without the intervention of a great corps of practical politicians. As I frequently said while advocating this charter before the people of Philadelphia, such a body constitutes a form of representative government which the voters themselves can handle with a minimum of political organization, and my gratification can be easily imagined when I read that Congressman Vare, one of the two brothers at present controlling the political organization in Philadelphia, declared before the Young Republicans "Abolish Councils and you lose your trained politicians. And if that happens where will we ever get a candidate for Mayor." Certainly our experience with Mayors has been such as to contemplate such a possibility with a considerable amount of equanimity.

This new provision, then, represents the embodiment of the representative district, the substitution of an effective instrument for a clumsy one and the establishment of a legislative body that will in time become not only a real policy determining body, but the basis of a city administrator form of government. I hesitate to use the term City Manager for that might be too considerable of a jolt. It is inevitable though that development of public opinion along those lines is in order.

For a generation dual office holding has been the corner stone of "organization" control of the Council and a curse and an obstacle of great resistance to forward movements. Hereafter no person may hold the office of councilman while holding any other office, position or employ-

ment of profit under the city, county or state and no Councilman shall be eligible to any office under the city during the term for which he shall have been elected. This will mean much in the way of political freedom, for councilmen will no longer be compelled to serve two masters.

Coupled with this prohibition of dual office holding is a modern civil service chapter introducing up-to-date methods of selecting public employes on a basis of merit administered by a commission elected by the council 21 instead of appointed by the mayor, who is the chief appointing power in the city and who should not be in a position to control or overrule those whose duty it is to serve as a check on his excesses or manipulation.

Political activity of any kind and payment of political contributions by policemen and firemen are made misdemeanors punishable by fine and imprisonment and those convicted of such practices are debarred from office holding for a period of two years. Moreover, any taxpayer may bring proceedings to have the employment of the offender declared illegal and to restrain payment of compensation to him, a tremendous lever for the effective enforcement of the law.

As originally introduced the charter bill made political activity on the part of any city or county employe punishable not only by dismissal, but also by fine and imprisonment; and the enforcement of this provisions was strengthened by giving any taxpayer the right to go into court and by writ of mandamus to compel dismissal. Under the new charter only police-men and firemen engaging in political activity are punishable by fine and imprisonment and may be dismissed by taxpayer's action. The sole punishment of other city employes is dismissal from the service, but is not made enforceable by a taxpayer's action.

These provisions however represent long steps forward and while there are those who wanted all officeholders placed in the same category, the most dangerous, the confirmed element—the police and the fire—are taken completely out of politics. This again represents the triumph of a generation's effort. The significance of the gain is fully appreciated when one recalls the notorious Fifth Ward scandal of 1917, where gunmen imported from New York operated under police protection to carry a ward and succeeded in murdering a policeman who was courageously trying to do his duty. For years one of the chief obligations laid upon a Philadelphia policeman has been to serve his political sponsors.

And, as The North American, in commenting on this liberating feature of the new Charter, said "The criminal classes and large number of the foreign-born population have been voted under police control, being corrupted by grants of immunity from prosecution for lawbreaking or coerced by threats of punishment. The murderous political outrages perpetrated in the fifth ward in September, 1917, when an uncorrupted policeman was killed and public officials were assaulted by imported gunmen, aroused a

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LOT AND BLOCK UNITS FOR MODERATE PRICED HOMES.

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of foot traffic than the modern automobile. Inasmuch as adequate footways require but one-sixth the space of cross streets and even less construction cost their use midway across blocks of lengths up to 1200 feet is permissible, particularly in districts with steep slopes making connecting streets expensive. In areas designed with deep courts and blind streets only partially cutting up the blocks, if each such court and street has a path leading from it across the block most of its disadvantages will disappear, though it will still be less easily policed or protected in case of fire than regular blocks.

While variation to the ordinary block and lot system which do not easily conform to rule have hitherto seldom been laid out, the increased attractiveness attending their use in a reasonable number of instances demands that the opportunity be not closed by rigid standards. As they are apt to be integral parts of the group designs for the actual houses their layout cannot be determined until the building program is adopted. Where interesting variation are not anticipated the minimum standard of blocks 180 to 200 feet by 600 to 800 feet, with lots 43 to 44 feet wide, is more apt than any other to be adapted to the future needs of the neighborhood.