

Commission Manager Plan

City Clerk Baker of London (Ont.) in a recent report to his Council on the Convention of the National Municipal League which he attended, made some very interesting comments on the Commission Manager plan, from which we quote the following:

The Commission Manager plan has won a permanent place in American Municipal Government. The trend of development is quite noticeable. The fact that the Commission should be legislative only, and the City Manager administrative, stood out more clearly than before. The Manager is not boss. In the old federal plan there was always a confusion of administration and legislative authority. The cloven hoof of politics always appeared in the administration department. The people of the cities have begun to see the fallacy of attempting to secure trained and competent officials by the election method. Very many of the best thinkers at the convention recognized as a weakness in the Commission form of government the fact that an effort was being made to elect members for the administration of the several departments of municipal activities. Two administrative authorities—Manager and Commission—must clash; friction cannot be avoided.

The fact that the management of Dayton had changed a debt of \$125,000 on current expenditures to a surplus of \$70,000, which had been transferred to the old debt account, was evidence of its utility. The further fact that no money had been borrowed to run current expenditure under Commission Manager form appealed to the members of the convention.

The Dayton plan provided for a board of five commissioners elected at large who, jointly, legislate only. The candidate receiving the highest vote is Mayor and receives \$1,800.00 a year. The four other members serve for \$1,500.00 a year. The Manager is elected by the Commission and receives \$1,250.00. The Manager is not the sole, but is the chief administrator. The Commissioners appear to administer departments and report to the Manager. Mr. Manager must be tactful or there would be much confusion in administration. The Commissioners must also be big men, in order to secure such efficiency.

Many a good Mayor, under the old system, with high ideals, and good business judgment, had entered his office with great hopes for the City, but had retired a failure, because the machinery of government was so intricate that co-operation of the various civic administrative departments prevented his accomplishing his desires. A City Manager has control of all departments and has it in his power to succeed and it is up to him to show results or satisfy the ratepayers.

It was claimed by Mr. Lovett of Detroit that the City Managers were "too efficient" and "mere efficiency will never solve the problem of municipal government." To this Mr. Garland of Dayton replied that no system could be more simple or more economic, and there is no heartless efficiency about it. Men who have served long in some city department, receive better treatment from a City Manager, and give better service than he ever received from a Council and Mayor.

Selling Good Government.

No system of government can succeed without publicity and the interest of the citizens. If ratepayers are well-informed, bad government is made impossible, and good government will be improved. Pitiless publicity was the main agent for efficient government. The speakers claimed that the reports sent out were too accurate and full for general information, and urged that more "humanized reports" be submitted from time to time. Statistics alone are dead. No newspaper, knowing the public, would publish them. It was, therefore, up to the government to give the vital touch to their reports and create right thinking.

Mr. Garland cited his own reports as an example. In Dayton, they supply lawyers to give free legal aid, who are always ready to go into Court, if necessary, to obtain justice for poor men and women who cannot afford to engage in law suits. In publishing their report, while the cost of the department was given from the Auditor's statement, they published a story of a negro scrub woman, a widow with children to support, who came to them stating that a lady for whom she had done a day's work had not paid her the dollar and a half due. The negro woman had gone four times to get this money, paying extra car fare

twice and walking a distance of several miles the other twice. In three days the \$1.50 was turned over to the scrub woman.

The Dayton Health Department has taken over the management of all charity grants by getting all citizen bodies, willingly, to co-operate. The Visiting Nurses Association, the Tuberculosis Association and the Charity Organizations are all given the use of the offices and officials in the City Hall free and, in this way, the charity work is consolidated and co-ordinated at a saving of much expense. In submitting the report, after giving briefly the cost of the department, the Commissioner tells a story of one of the nurses taking some chrysanthemums, grown in the city parks, to a sick child of poor parents who cried out, "Somebody was good to me to send me the rich man's flowers." The fact that the city supplied these beautiful mums to the city's poor showed its interest in its poor people. The Commissioner also outlined the plan, under the management of the Welfare Department, by which the citizens of Dayton, on payment of one dollar a year, might become members of the Country Club, and the report also cited some workmen's enjoyment of the privilege.

DIRECT LEGISLATION AND THE RECALL.

The initiative, referendum and recall mean public ownership of the Government. If the control of affairs is put in the hands of a few men for life without responsibility to the controlled the Government is oligarchical and undesirable. If the control is for three years it is oligarchical. Many a monarch's reign has been shorter than the terms of some of our representatives who should be subject to the control of the voters every moment.

Ought the people's will to govern all the time, or only now and then?

Someone has said no one will oppose direct legislation "unless he is at heart opposed to popular government." John Quincy Adams said "The will of the people is the end of all legitimate government on earth."

The initiative is the proposal of a law by a reasonable percentage of the voters. The referendum is the submission of a measure to the voters for final approval or rejection; obligatory, when all but urgency measures must be submitted; optional when submission may be required by petition of a reasonable percentage of voters. The initiative is the right of asking or a decision by the voters, and the referendum is the right of making such decision.

It will perfect the representative system, correcting the evils of the unguarded method of making laws by final vote of a body of delegates beyond the reach of any immediate effective control by the voters.

It will remove the concentration of temptation by diffusing power; it will no longer pay to influence a few legislators, because their action will not be final. It will eliminate legislative corruption, kill the lobby, discourage log-rolling, prevent unwise franchise grants.

It will destroy the power of legislators to legislate for personal ends and the power of unscrupulous minorities in legislative bodies.

It will diminish partisanship and tend to wipe out party lines and voters may vote on particular measures according to their convictions without leaving their party or deserting its candidates.

It will tend to the diffusion of wealth by depriving the wealthy of their too great power in government and placing greater legislative power in the middle and producing classes.

Every election is a reference to the voters; direct legislation simply extends the application of the principle and improves the method. Instead of referring many questions for a compound judgment a judgment is asked for on each question.

Voters will never thoroughly understand public affairs until they decide on issues and cease carrying on public business by proxy. It is a common-sense application of the established principles of agency, affording the principle the right of veto, direction, control and discharge.—Howard S. Ross.