

THE CANADIAN MUNICIPAL JOURNAL

AND REVIEW OF CIVIC IMPROVEMENT

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A Commission and a City Manager

On August 12th, the citizens of Dayton, Ohio, followed the example set by Galveston after its catastrophe and adopted a decidedly new type of municipal government. The new charter provides for the short, non-partisan ballot, a city manager, and a legislative commission, and is said to be the most advanced charter ever adopted by an American city. Dayton is the first city of any size in the country to acquire a city manager in place of a multitude of elected officers, and the first to combine the best features of the old commission plan with the manager idea.

The Dayton Charter provides for five commissioners who will have purely legislative functions; the administration of the city's business being left to a trained city manager employed by them. There is no diffusion of responsibility as seen in the straight commission plan where each commissioner is in active charge of a department. To complete the balance of power, the people are given the right of the initiative, referendum, protest and recall.

An integral part of the Dayton plan of government is the short non-partisan ballot and the elimination of ward lines. At the same time a long list of petty offices are taken off the ballot and made appointive. Under the new plan the commissioners are chosen for a four year term, half of the body being elected every two years. This feature of concentrating responsibility in the hands of a few men was desperately fought by all of the old party machines.

The administration of the city is divided into five departments, the heads of which are appointed by the manager. All remaining city officers are subject to civil service appointment. A unique feature is the creation of a department of social welfare, which, in addition to supervising the departments of health, parks, and playgrounds, must make inquiries into the causes of poverty and disease in the city, and make recommendations to the legislative body.

The new charter is also unusual in providing for the complete administrative machinery of the city, designed in harmony with the most advanced ideas of city management. Plans are made for a scientific budget, complete auditing of city accounts, a modern accounting system, purchasing agent, standardization of city supplies, time and service records, and many other advances. These innovations are the result of investigations made by the Charter Commission into the government of New York, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati.

The new charter will take effect January first, 1914, and it is expected that its results will be a decided stimulus to the movement for better city government.

The adoption of this charter will mean the election in November of five commissioners and the government in full operation by January first, 1914.

We have been asked to give our frank and candid opinion of the plan outlined above.

The citizens of Dayton are to be congratulated upon the advanced move they have made. That is "advanced" according to the condition of municipal government in sister cities in the United States.

But it is almost amusing to read of "new departures" in civic government which have always obtained on this side of the line.

The "short, non-partisan ballot" which is "an integral part of the Dayton form of government" has been in existence in Canada ever since votes were cast. No one here could even dream of any party emblems being seen on a ballot paper. And as for being "short," the case of the City of Montreal in the most complex election may serve as a sample of a "short ballot." Three separate ballot papers were handed to the voter. On one he chose one of two names for the Mayor. On a second, he chose four out of eighteen names for the Controllers. The third ballot paper was only necessary in those wards in which there was a contest for the seat as Alderman. There were, of course, no signs as to which party the candidate belonged. Only the names, in alphabetical order, with the candidate's business or profession under the name. And it seems ridiculous to think of the tyrannous ballot papers that have been in existence in Dayton until the present change, and which still keep so many of the cities of the United States under the control of party bosses.

Then the elimination "of a long list of petty offices" from the ballot! Why, of course this is a good thing. The only humorous part is that our friends across the line are only just waking up to the absurdity of electing paid officials, who should naturally be permanent, entirely free from the caprices of an election. Many people in Canada could hardly be made to believe that any modern, civilized community would elect any petty officer, or even the head of a department.

The idea of a City Manager is novel, though Westmount, Que., has got ahead of Dayton by a few months. But there is far less need of a City Manager under our Canadian system of permanent heads of departments. In Canadian cities the Clerk, Treasurer, Engineer, Assessment Commissioner, Fire Chief, Police Chief, and other officials go serenely on with their work while the election for Council is proceeding, secure in the knowledge that no new Council will flout public opinion by disturbing them, if they are doing their work satisfactorily. Each of these is a manager of his own department, so there is not such a pressing need for the new office of City Manager.

The introduction of initiative, referendum, protest and recall seems to be necessary in the new Commission system. But if the citizens do their duty, and choose good men as Commissioners, these new forms of expression of the people's will are likely to become rusty for want of use. If the right men have been elected it would be a piece of impertinence for the citizens to initiate any piece of legislation. The idea of any individual suggested to the Commissioners, would certainly be examined, and if the men who have been elected for their judgment believe it to be good, they will certainly initiate it themselves. In the same way, the exercise of the recall is an admission that the voters chose the wrong man. In short, these parts of the

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