

MUNICIPALISM AND BUREAUCRACY

At a recent meeting of the Incorporated Municipal Electrical Association held at Sheffield, England, the president in his opening referred to the municipilization of electric plants, and said:

"There is a feeling in the minds of many that it is not well for the control of so many public utilities to fall in the hands of officials. This feeling is well illustrated by the following which I quote from a powerful and deservedly popular newspaper of more than local influence, the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*. Commenting upon last year's salary increase list the writer said:

Municipalism is creating a bureaucracy which in the long run is inevitably a bulwark against advancement, progress, and individual liberty. It is evolving a class of expert, highly-paid officials, into whose hands the real reins of government must inevitably fall. The constantly changing succession of amateur administrators, which the principle of popular election provides, can only follow with more or less humility the dictates of the real powers.

"I cannot agree with this statement in any way; the increase in the number and importance of municipal officials is only a consequence of the increased scope of corporation activities, which has at least the sanction of the electorate, and in the newer branches of corporation work, men frequently enter its ranks from private business and again leave it for the often superior inducements of service with a private firm. That, as a body, these men are bureaucratic I deny. They often have no monopoly to administer, but must compete with private trades having greater liberty of action, and can only succeed by giving the best possible service to the public unhampered by any restrictions beyond those essential to the equal and fair treatment of every member of the community."

The view taken by different parties on the influence and remuneration of public officials depends of course to a large extent upon their attitude towards the principle of municipal trading. And those who favor it, or have at least given attention to the subject, realize that the magnitude of the various undertakings controlled by municipalities to-day calls for the keen supervision and directing initiative which characterizes the management of the best class of private business, and the salaries for which, at first sight considerable, may easily prove to be the best of investments and yield a good return in a satisfactory and economical service.

The Continuity of Chairmen.

The decision of the council of one of the largest municipalities in the United Kingdom, whereby it is decreed that a member of the corporation cannot hold office as chairman of a committee for a longer period than three years, was referred to as follows:

"In my opinion the continuity of the chairman and principal members of committees is essential to the successful development and well-being of the department, particularly so in the case of an electric supply, where the intricacies of working cannot be grasped in a short time, but can only be gained gradually by actual experience. Therefore, it may happen that at the time when a chairman is compelled to relinquish his office he has become fully capable of efficiently guiding and controlling the electrical enterprise of the corporation, which would, by reason of its complexity, be left entirely to the official in charge unless the principal members of the controlling committee were prepared to devote some time and attention to mastering the principles which underlie its successful working.

"The advocates of the 'short-period' policy would probably say that the control of the department does not rest with the chairman, but is in the hands of the committee. But, as a matter of fact, the committee is largely

guided by its chairman and those members who act as chairmen of sub-committees, for the simple reason that by virtue of their offices they have familiarized themselves with the details of the administration of the department in a much greater degree than the other members of the committee are able to, and are therefore better able to explain matters relating to the working of the department and advise the committee accordingly.

Under existing arrangements there is always the risk that the policy of the department may be interrupted by a change of party in power, and although it does not necessarily follow that the installation of a new chairman denotes a discontinuance of the policy adopted, yet it may often re-act unfavorably upon the undertaking, inasmuch as the change will generally necessitate a considerable amount of work on the part of the engineer in order to put the new committee properly in possession of information which is essential to their appreciation of his schemes and requests.

IOWA ACCOUNTING LAW.

The Iowa Legislature last year enacted a municipal accounting law, the two first sections of which are as follows:

Section 1.—Annual Financial Report.

It shall be the duty of the chief accounting and warrant issuing officer of each city and town, namely, auditor or clerk, as the case may be, to prepare and to publish the annual report of the financial condition and transactions of the city and town now or hereafter required by law, and all accounting officers of all boards of commission departments and offices whatsoever within the corporate area receiving or disbursing public funds, shall file with the auditor or clerk within thirty days from the expiration of their fiscal year, a report in writing of their official transactions in the form and manner required by law. In case of refusal or gross neglect to comply with the law and provisions herein governing the method of accounting for and reporting municipal transactions herein referred to, the official so delinquent shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor. The auditor or clerk aforesaid is hereby authorized to institute legal proceedings to enforce the provisions herein requiring report to him.

Section 2.—How Published.

In cities having a population of five thousand or over, the annual report aforesaid shall be printed in pamphlet form. At least five hundred copies of said reports shall be printed, and the expense thereof shall be provided for annually by the city council. In cities and towns having less than five thousand population, the annual report may be published in pamphlet form, if authorized by the council.

"PEOPLE are almost afraid to die for fear there should not be room to bury them," is what a Parish Councillor at Linfield told a Local Government Board Inspector. The local Council are asking authority for a loan for cemetery enlargement.

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The neighborhood of Walkerton is said to be one of the best places in Ontario for the buggy business on account of the rough roads and the great quantity of stones on the roads. A feeble agitation is being raised to improve the roads, but if the buggy manufacturers are half alive to their business, they will see that it is promptly stamped out. The idea of trying to kill the buggy business that way!—(Ex.)