

METROPOLITAN DISTRICTS FOR PLANNING AND ADMINISTRATION*

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THE need of community co-operation has grown more and more urgent with greater concentration of population and with the development of conditions in the Western hemisphere similar to those which have long been prevalent in Europe. Many municipal problems are in no wise limited to artificial political boundaries, and in many such cases efficiency and economy are secured by central control. Such undertakings as water supply, drainage, sewerage, main thoroughfares, park developments and general planning are accomplished much better under united action, and thus haphazard development may be avoided.

Districts surrounding large cities have problems as complicated as those within the urban territory. This is evident from the fact that during the decade from 1900 to 1910 the population of 25 cities in the United States having more than 200,000 inhabitants increased 33 per cent., while the districts lying outside, but within 10 miles of the central unit, increased 43 per cent. of the population; 25 per cent. of the population of the United States live within the area of these 25 metropolitan districts, and within these same districts there are 170 different municipal units, each having a population of over 5,000. The necessity of continuity and community of action is therefore apparent.

The objection is often made that such co-operation conflicts with home rule, but the conflict is only seeming, for, as a matter of fact, home rule does not mean the right of the city to injure its neighbors by neglecting, in its development, to consider their interests. The desire for local autonomy and the frequent ambition of energetic municipal representatives should not cause us to lose sight of the sovereignty of the state and of the requirement that individual communities as well as persons must give way to the common good and the need of the many. A paragraph from a recent publication by W. Jethrow Brown, Professor of Law, in the University of Adelaide, Australia, entitled "The Underlying Principles of Modern Legislation," is pertinent in this connection:

"If, then, we take the various factors already mentioned and regard them in combination—the pressure of social and economic problems, the democratization of our political machinery, and the growth in the sense of collective responsibility—we must conclude that the supreme problem of the future will be, not how to thwart the movement towards state control, but how to direct it in such a way as to achieve legitimate ends without sacrificing the individuality of the citizen."

Many examples exist of attempts to secure the benefits of co-operation by annexation and by county control, but such methods are useful only in cases where the whole area involved is completely saturated as to population. Many cases exist where these forms of organization are wholly inapplicable, and for such instances the best type yet developed is the formation of municipalities into a metropolitan district under commission control. This preserves local autonomy, develops individual initiative, and at the same time brings about a realization of the need of serving the common good by co-operative action and by the submergence of local pride and selfishness.

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It must not be supposed that there are no disadvantages; some of them are the occasional lack of complete representation, and sometimes the development of works ahead of the immediate requirements. This, however, need not be so, because true community planning will provide for construction only so fast as it is needed, although the plan should take a long look into the future. Means of meeting the expense of big public works, how this expense shall be distributed and apportioned, and what part, if any, shall be borne by territory not yet developed, but which will be brought into development by the building of such works, are all serious questions and may prove to be stumbling blocks, or even the rocks upon which the project may be wrecked.

The irrigation and levee districts of the United States and Canada, and the flood prevention districts of Ohio are all analagous to the metropolitan district in providing the benefits of co-operation under commission direction, as is also the Ontario Hydro-Electric Commission. More typical are the urban district organizations of London and Berlin and the Metropolitan Public Works combinations of Boston, New York, Winnipeg and Vancouver.

Greater London, comprising 530 square miles under the control of the Metropolitan Water Board; and containing 2 cities, 35 boroughs, 58 districts and over 35 poor law unions and parishes; and including also the Metropolitan Police District, which covers 692 square miles with a population of over 8,000,000, is the most extensive urban metropolitan district government in the world. This form of administration was made possible by a series of acts, beginning with the Local Government Act of 1888, and culminating in the Metropolitan Water Act in 1902. The cities of Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and Glasgow have similar districts extended for different public works. Community of interest between the municipal area and adjacent territory is shown, however, most completely in the English Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909, which permits "a town planning scheme with reference to any land within or in the neighborhood of a given municipality."

The most important illustrations of this type of organization on the North American continent may be found in the Boston Metropolitan District in Massachusetts. The Metropolitan Park Commission was organized in 1893 and has broad administrative powers over parks and open spaces in the 13 cities and 26 towns surrounding Massachusetts Bay. The Metropolitan Sewerage Commission was formed in 1889 and the Metropolitan Water Board in 1895, the two being merged into the Metropolitan Water and Sewerage Board in 1901. The sewerage and drainage of 12 cities and 11 towns, covering an area of 190 square miles, with a population of 1,000,000, and the water supply of 9 cities and 9 towns included within an area of 175 square miles with a population of 1,250,000, are under the administration of this combined board. More recently a Metropolitan Fire Prevention Commission has been organized, having jurisdiction over 22 cities and towns and extensive powers and duties relative to fire protection and prevention and the study of fire hazards. The record of the development of legislation and of the study of the metropolitan district idea in the Boston district, contained in the report of the first Commission in 1894, the second one in 1909, a third in 1911 and a fourth in 1912, forms a most interesting review of the history of this important type of community action.

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