

Denver Discards Commission Government

A very interesting explanation is given by Ellis Meredith in the National Municipal Review for Denver throwing over Commission Government. The article partially reads as follows:

By an overwhelmingly decisive vote Denver discarded the commission form of government May 9 and adopted a charter amendment which gives practically all executive power to the mayor and creates a city council of nine members.

The new charter provides for a benevolent despotism. It does not repeal the initiative and referendum nor the recall. It doesn't even repeal the preferential ballot. It concentrates all the administrative powers in the hands of the mayor and all the legislative powers in the hands of the council, with an auditor independent of both. The present auditor serves until the end of his term, and next May his successor will be elected for a term of four years, also a council of nine members to be nominated and elected by districts for a term of two years. Four of the present council have been appointed by Mayor Speer and the other five by the Denver civic and commercial association, the trades assembly, the real estate exchange, the rotary club and the manufacturer's association, and while they have just organized and have had no time to formulate plans, the general public is well satisfied with the personnel of the council.

Four departments are created, the heads of which form the mayor's cabinet; they have charge respectively of the improvements and parks, revenue, health and charity and safety and excise.

The mayor is given the power to appoint the heads of all administrative departments and the members of all commissions, boards and officers, and all persons in the employ of the city or county or any of the departments thereof whose salaries or compensations are not fixed in the charter amendments are declared to be employees and shall be appointed by the mayor or department head, and the mayor is given power to fill all vacancies. In other words, he is given complete power of appointment.

The one particular section which is nearest the heart of Mayor Speer is said to be entirely new in city governments in this country. It is short and somewhat vague, and sufficiently elastic to cover a very wide scope of endeavor, as anything has need to be when it is frankly experimental in character. Nothing is a greater mistake than hard and fast rules and limitations when embarking on an undertaking where precedents are few and success depends largely upon freedom to carry out a design that grows in the making. This section provides:

"There shall be, and hereby is, created an industrial bureau for the purpose of encouraging local industries and employment of labor. It shall be limited in its expenditures to the amount of money appropriated for its use by the city and county. It shall consist of the mayor and four members appointed by him, who shall serve without pay. This bureau shall be vested with full power of the city and county to encourage industries, stimulate trade and secure the employment of labor."

The idea of Mayor Speer, as he outlined it in his campaign, is that there are many small concerns engaged in manufacturing all sorts of things, and hampered in all sorts of ways. Sometimes there are obvious difficulties, and sometimes there are leaks that take away the profit. In one place he found the proprietor discharging a man, who almost begged to be retained. On investigation he found that the man was manufacturing an article used extensively in Denver, but imported. A little missionary work brought supply and demand together, and the employee kept his job. For months past the new mayor has been making a quiet investigation among the little shops and plants of the city, and now he has a well defined determination, rather than an exact plan, to help "to separate the men who want work from the men who won't work," and take care of both of them in the way that will be most beneficial to the community.

During his former administrations public improvements were pushed vigorously — beyond what many felt the city was able to bear. In the four years since he went out of office there has not been a great deal done in that direction. This is, perhaps, one of the innate weaknesses of commission government. Each commissioner wants all the funds he can get for his own department, and they are not willing to yield for the greater good of the community. So far as one can judge from his utterances Mayor Speer does not intend to launch out into any very extensive im-

provements which would call for increased taxation; already he has begun his promised era of economy by lopping off surplus clerks, consolidating departments, abolishing sinecures, and leaving the outside workers alone in the main. The day laborer, who makes parks and boulevards beautiful, is not trembling for his "job," even though the civil service, which is a poor thing under the Denver charter, does not protect him.

There is one most unusual condition following this election. Noman has ever had more active opponents than Robert Speer, and his election was bitterly fought by men and women who are not "quitters," yet the prevailing opinion seems to be patient, rather than censorious. It is recognized that under this charter the mayor is supreme, and while there are not wanting those who are not looking for any good things, let alone a millenium to come as a result of this election, still the general opinion is that the new administration should have a chance to demonstrate what the one man power can do, when it has a free field.

Human Nature Does Not Change.

An explanation is offered for Denvers reversion to the older system. The people of the city, it is reported, discovered that human nature did not change in government machinery and that officials who had been incompetent under one system remained incompetent under the other. And with this it must be remembered that the centralization of power effected by the commission plan increases possibilities for abuse by untrustworthy officials. The lesson of the Denver experience seems to be that the first essential toward bettering municipal abuses is to awaken the public to the need for betterment. With a body of sound public opinion at work it matters comparatively little by what machinery it operates. Without sound public opinion, no kind of machinery will get good results in government.

DAYLIGHT SAVING UNPOPULAR IN LONDON.

A petition has been submitted to the city council of London, Ont., signed by the heads of prominent business firms asking that the Daylight Saving By-Law, which has been in force about a month be repealed. The fact of London time being out of harmony with all of Western Ontario has resulted, according to the petition, "in the loss of sleep and efficiency in business."

As a consequence of the petition the council has rescinded the by-law.

TREATMENT OF SEWAGE FACILITATED.

The necessity for proper treatment and disposal of sewage cannot be too strongly emphasized in Canada. Many municipalities have been very active along these lines but unfortunately a greater percentage have been extremely negligent. The result of this, as shown in a report on "Water-Works and Sewerage Systems in Canada," recently issued by the Commission of Conservation, is that more than sixty of our inland water systems are at present receiving raw sewage, 180 municipalities contributing to this very undesirable condition. The practice of treating sewage is being recognized as imperative throughout the civilized world and would possibly spread more rapidly throughout Canada were some of its economic aspects better known. Recent experiments have been made in this connection to determine the feasibility of a new process to extract grease and fertilizer base from sewage.

Ordinary sewage sludge from settling basins is greasy, offensive and of so little practical value that farmers will not accept it for fertilizer, even as a gift; yet this sludge contains valuable fertilizing elements and considerable grease. The setting of the sludge and the extraction of the grease is facilitated by the addition of certain chemicals and the process is found to possess the following advantages:

1. The chemical treatment practically pays for itself by the sale of the grease and fertilizer recovered.
 2. The sewage is disinfected.
 3. The chemical acts as a strong deodorizer and prevents the usual nuisance of treatment works.
 4. The fly nuisance is also avoided for the same reason.
- The process has been thoroughly investigated and tested, with results that seem to indicate that it will not only be successful, but profitable.