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MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

The Royal Commission on Municipal Government in British Columbia, which recently published its report, made a thorough investigation of various forms of municipal government. In some quarters it was suggested to the commission that every large city municipality should be given power to abolish the present form of government by mayor and council, and to entrust all its affairs, legislative as well as executive, to a small body of commissioners elected by the city at large, and paid an adequate remuneration for devoting their whole time to the city's business. This is what is usually called the commission form of civic government. It has been adopted in a number of cities we visited in the United States, the largest of them being Oakland and Omaha. During the short time it has been in force (in no case exceeding twelve years) the results obtained appear to be satisfactory. In Boston, however, two years ago, when the city was obtaining a new charter, they investigated the commission form of government and decided against it, but did away with the two branches of the council and reduced the membership to the nine aldermen of the present council, leaving the executive power in the hands of the mayor. In Portland, Oregon, and Los Angeles, California, proposals to adopt commission government have been defeated, whilst in New Orleans (a city of about 400,000) commission government came into force on December 2nd, 1912.

It is interesting to know that while several Canadian cities are considering the adoption of the commission form of government, the British Columbia commission think it would be a mistake to adopt such a system in that

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province. For one thing, they consider that it places too much uncontrolled power in the hands of a few men. The commissioners, as a rule, do not exceed five in number. The result is that three may control a city, and among the three would often be found one man who would dominate the other two. The tendency, therefore, is strongly towards one-man government. If the city autocrat happens to be a wise and reasonable man, the results would, from one point of view, be good. From another point of view, Messrs. Keary, Maclean and Bull, our Pacific Coast commissioners, think that, even in the case of a good autocrat, the results would be bad. Where there is a fairly numerous council, a number of men are always being trained in the conduct of public business by the discussion of affairs in the council and its committee. The training thus received fits them for the discharge of higher representative duties. It will frequently be found that men who have distinguished themselves in the legislature or in parliament have received their first training in a municipal council. Under commission government the supply of such men would largely, if not wholly, fail. "We observed," says the British Columbia report, "that public discussion of civic affairs practically ceased where commission government obtained. The commissioners go through the form of holding public meetings; but it is an empty form, as there is no discussion in the proper sense of the term, everything being arranged beforehand in private meeting. It is obvious that if the affairs of the city fall into the hands of two or three bad men under the commission form, they might do the city an irreparable injury, as they are usually elected for a term of from two to four years."

To guard against this danger the clumsy device of "recall" has been adopted. The "recall" means that if a certain percentage of the electors become dissatisfied with