

## Signs of the Times

(By S. BAKER.)

The most generally advocated reform in municipal government is the separation of the legislative functions from the administrative. The legislator should be a fair representative of the people, the embodiment of their intelligence and idealism, their aim and desires. He should be directly in touch with the ratepayers. The administrator, on the other hand, is not interested in the politics of the people, their vote, nor their ideals. He should be an expert operator and independent. The expert has been described as a man extraordinarily intelligent on some branch of work, and a real expert is always more or less a monomaniac. He should never do more than advise as to legislation. He should always hold a subordinate place, except in so far as by his knowledge he can influence the judgment of the representative of the people.

The people must pay the taxation and they should have the responsibility of determining what is to be done. Experts for administrative purposes cannot be elected to public offices, and should be appointed by the people's representatives, paid reasonable salaries, and compelled to give real expert service.

The management of a city has become a gigantic business. Men without technical knowledge and practical experience, without authority, or proven business ability, too frequently try to govern the municipality, but generally they allow things to drift. What is more objectionable they have muzzled the engineer and other heads of departments, and the ratepayer is not allowed to know the truth. The councillors in power practise on the citizens the confidence trick on a gigantic scale. The expert is too often the scare-goat for mistakes. That condition prevails not only in England and Canada, but in all democracies, Switzerland alone excepted.

That there should be an administrative department is a corollary of the preceding contention. Thirty men can deliberate, decide a policy, or legislate better than five or one, but five or one can administer better than thirty.

Germany owes her efficiency in municipal matters not to the Germans themselves, but to the political system which Frederick William the First, and Frederick the Great have created, so that a single will animates the whole administration. The whole Council acts like a single man, and every other consideration is subordinated to the city's interest, instead of squabbling over the question whether a corporation laborer lives within the city limits, or whether an alderman should go to a Fire Chiefs' Convention, or whether a committee should deal with a question before reference to a Board of Control.

Then, too, some department should be responsible to the Council, and should have control over the administration, subject to the general direction of the Council, just as the manager of a private corporation discharges its business.

The City Manager plan, although of recent growth and designed to meet the demand for concentration of authority, has not proven altogether a success. Mr. Cressley, City Manager of Inglewood, California, states, "The City Manager should be a civil engineer with municipal experience and possess the qualifications of an economist, a financier and executive officer of no mean ability." The affairs of a city are more complex, and cover more widely divergent operations than the usual business concern. The number of stockholders are more numerous and more personally interested. The duties of a City Manager, therefore, and the experience we have had appears to be against the City Manager.

There is also a tendency in favor of smaller Councils, elected by the city at large. The larger part of the time and energies of these men must necessarily be occupied with administrative problems, and a small number does not suggest the most efficient kind of a legislative body. The advocates of Commission form of government recognized this difficulty, and introduced the Initiative, Referendum and Recall, to have the legislative functions in part exercised by the people at large. It is extremely doubtful that experience with these innovations has demonstrated any material advance in the search for a business-like administration. A consideration of the former two suggestions would prove the weakness of this movement.

The trend of public opinion appears to be to replace the city government, composed of a Mayor, a City Council, divided into committees, numerous boards or commissions,

all independent and more or less jealous of each other with overlapping jurisdiction and conflicting authority, by a single board. This is due to the creation of spending bodies,—Library, Park, Utilities Commission and others—reducing the Council to a tax collecting body. Present conditions prove this change necessary.

The most significant fact is the creation of Civic Bureaus of Research, Civic Survey Committees, Rotary Clubs, and Ward Taxpayers' Associations. The people have, on their own initiative, taken up the discussion of city policies, made graft impossible, and aroused criticism. These Associations are not for securing a pavement or a walk, but for the discussion of the debenture debt, the administration of city departments, and the better government of the municipality. These bodies must be regarded in the municipal system.

### Suggested Reforms.

The Council's powers should be restricted to legislative functions and the adoption of estimates. The membership should be increased to at least six from each ward, twenty elected by City at large, elected for a term of three years, and a representative of the Board of Trade, the Trades and Labor Council, the Builders' Exchange, and Civic Survey Committee, or the Rotary Club or Civic Improvement, made consultative members thereof.

This would provide a town meeting—the admittedly true aim of British municipal government—be educational, everyone would know what is going on, and lead to a more intelligent discussion of municipal matters throughout the year instead of as at present, at election time only, and recognize the public right to participate in the management of the city. One meeting a month should be sufficient.

Men of large business experience would be found willing to act as directors in the people's business, if they were relieved of responsibility of details, if the personal squabbles ever present in Council meetings were made less probable, and the heads of civic departments held strictly to efficient management.

Policies only should be discussed by the Council. Town planning arrangements, a system of pavement construction, and financial programmes are not now discussed, notwithstanding that without discussion money and time are wasted and work haphazard. The future needs of the city would not be overshadowed by the present demands.

There is little call for greater opportunities to secure an expression of the will of the people. The elections come every year, but there is a need for some opportunity to educate, interest and awaken the ratepayer from his eleven months of indifference to a sense of duty.

European countries have adopted this system, so have a number of American cities, and it is the practice in most British cities. The Council is almost wholly legislative, and the permanent officials executive.

The judicious Bagehot says, "The natural instinct of an Englishman is to resist or ignore authority." The mass of citizens assume they have rights, but not that they have duties. When the masses are induced to share in the government we shall find the open sesame to good government.

The Board of Control should be administrative only, and they should be held accountable for the proper discharge of all city affairs.

Ontario at first administered city affairs through Committees of Council, and then developed the idea of a partly executive and administrative Board of Control for the larger cities. This was a wise attempt to meet the demands of cities, but I see no reason why every city should not have a Board of Control.

### City Manager.

No one man can fill the position of a City Manager—experts will still be required. Brainy, alert, common sense, executive business men are what expert officials ask for. The Mayor and Board of Control should be given power to co-ordinate the activities of all departments, and, if necessary, to compel unity of action. What has been lacking has not been technical skill, but business management; not more officials, but more opportunities for use of the skill and initiative of the officials we now have.

Municipal government would be nearer to the simplicity, flexibility and efficiency of business management if controlled by a few men elected by the ratepayers, and the policies determined by a really representative Council.