

EFFICIENCY IN CIVIC UNDERTAKINGS

A FIXED POLICY OF KEEPING ABREAST WITH ALL MODERN IMPROVEMENTS AND SECURING THE MAXIMUM POSSIBLE EFFICIENCY WILL YIELD HANDSOME RETURNS TO ANY MUNICIPALITY.

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IT is remarkable how the European war has been instrumental in promoting efficiency in almost every sphere of human activity. Every belligerent nation is compelled by force of circumstances to pay attention to all details and to increase the efficiency of its military and civil organizations, for it is only in this way that the acknowledged power of the enemies can be combated. But every progressive nation also perceives that to maintain its position in the commercial struggle that will follow the declaration of peace, its efficiency from every standpoint must be not only maintained, but increased. A nation, after all, is only what her people make it. It is the aggregation of individual effort, aspiration and efficiency, and the direction of her power or weakness will be governed by the intelligence, loftiness and energy of the people.

Efficiency is by no means a new element in national life. The Romans and the Greeks were gripped by its attractiveness, according to their national conceptions of its value. But the war has emphasized its immense importance not only to those engaged in the conflict, but also to the countries which are neutral and yet are shaken to the very foundations of commerce, finance and idealism. Efficiency demands the maximum results by the application of the best knowledge and experience that is available, and all who have observed will recognize what enormous strides have been made during the last two years in this connection.

Efficiency in civic undertakings is equally important. Health, comfort, convenience and prosperity depend upon the standard of civic administration. Democracy, however, has not been productive of efficient civic government to the extent that it might be expected. It would be natural to anticipate that the people would insist upon getting the maximum service of every dollar paid in taxes, that they would always elect representatives who were qualified by experience and knowledge to administer the affairs of the city, that efficiency would be the *sin qua non* of every voter, that all undertakings which help to build up a desirable city should be provided and efficiently maintained; in short, that everything necessary for the amenity, health progress, and beautifying of the city should be organized and arranged in the same manner as would be done by its most successful citizens.

This is perhaps too Utopian an idea to be realized under any democratic system of government, but nevertheless it is one which should be aimed at. The paradox is that whilst it is everybody's duty to secure the most efficient service, unfortunately functions of this category are generally neglected by most people because they are not always qualified to judge. The majority of the people are too busy with their own daily work to pay close attention to municipal affairs. They leave that duty for others to perform, and herein lies the weakness of our civic government as a general rule.

Our American friends endeavor to remedy this defect by a change in the form of government, more or less adapting the German system to meet American needs. The principal of referring matters and appointments to

the electorate, while truly democratic, does not lead to the goal of efficiency. We need some incentive for the people to elect their representatives strictly on their merits, and leave the business of technical, financial and other administrations in their hands to carry out to the best advantage of the city. The representatives should be encouraged to continue serving the city, because then their experience ripens, their knowledge expands, and their abilities become established.

Efficiency in executive management is to be attained when the officials are given a free hand to control the affairs of their department and given to understand that successful administration will merit reward. Economy does not mean parsimony; efficiency does not entail autocratic control. It is, of course, necessary to prescribe the policy and limitations of officials, but to circumscribe their operations by any unreasonable directions or desires of representatives who are not fully acquainted with the onerous and important duties devolving upon officials, oftentimes means inefficiency. The misfortune in such cases is that the officials are blamed for what is not their fault.

It is highly important that the health of the community should be conserved. This does not imply that the work devolves solely upon the medical officer of health, for the construction and maintenance of waterworks, sewers, sewage disposal plants, roads and other work are closely associated with the preservation of health. Pure water, clean surroundings, good housing, disposal of waste products of all kinds, etc., have a patent influence upon the standard of public health.

It is just as important to maintain the works efficiently as to build them efficiently, yet how often is it recorded that the operations are inefficient? Efficiency of design and construction means that the works are built in the best possible manner for the purpose intended, but all this may be wasted almost completely if efficiency does not take place in their maintenance and operation.

It is, however, a strange fact that maintenance does not appeal so strongly as construction. We all participate in the pleasure of building, and we desire to have beautiful homes. But we neglect to repair a small leak in the roof which may cause serious damage to our property. In the same manner neglect to maintain water filters in a constant state of efficiency has caused outbursts of sickness and loss of life for which money cannot compensate. Sewage works built on approved lines, if allowed to become inadequate or mismanaged, may be a source of annoyance and loss to the community. Roads, even when constructed in a most excellent manner, require efficient maintenance, so that the people may derive the full benefit from them.

It must not be implied by the foregoing observations that inefficiency prevails, for that is not the point the writer desires to impress. The term efficiency is a relative one. It is not possible to standardize efficiency, because with the advance of scientific knowledge what was good yesterday may be made better to-morrow. The point which may be pressed forward is that efficiency entails the utilization of the best knowledge and experience