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**COMMISSION GOVERNMENT**

— V. —

**THE EFFICIENCY OF A COMMISSION**

"Till now we have assured ourselves: 'A city is a business corporation'—and run it with a legislature."

In a previous article we have seen how the removal of officials is placed directly in the hands of the people by the Recall. This must continuously be borne in mind in the following discussion. For the people have always guarded the power which they have cautiously bestowed in their public officers. They have since the beginning of this republic taken every precaution to keep a check on each department of government lest it get too powerful and overthrow the rights of the people for their own profit.

If this has led to great evils in the national government—it has occasioned even greater ones proportionately in city government. A city is a corporation, doing business—yet we load it with a balanced power which can do no business quickly and cheaply and effectively and which has at the same time afforded a good nesting place for all of the evils of American politics.

The beginnings of city government in this country were from small villages. There were no great cities. The framers of the constitution of the United States did well when they made the constitution because they could draw from the vast experience of England and their own struggle against the mother country.

But when it came to the town—

What was done—it was shoved off to shift for itself without a model to draw from. Boston did not get a city charter until 1822 although it had been operating for two centuries previously. The development was from the village and the town.

Listen to what Seth Low says in a chapter on Municipal Government contributed to Bryce's American Commonwealth:

"Growing thus out of the town, it happened very naturally that the first conception of the city on the part of Americans was that which had applied to the town and the village as local subdivisions of the commonwealth. Charters were framed as if they were little states. Americans are only now learning after many years of bitter experience that they are not so much little states as large corporations. Many of the mistakes which have marked the progress of American cities up to this point have sprung from that defective conception.

The aim deliberately was, to make a city government where no officer by himself, should have the power to do much harm. The natural result of this was to create a situation where no officer had power to do much good. Meanwhile bad men united for corrupt purposes and the whole organization of the city government aided such in throwing responsibility from one to another."

Now the question has always been, how can we elect men and give them all the power they want without giving ourselves into the power of unscrupulous men and handing over our rights which will be used to our disadvantage? This question having been settled by the Recall, by which the citizens may take the reins into their own hands at anytime, the thing is easy.

Some thirty-five cities in various parts of North America have dis-

pensed with the old plan of mayor, board of works, councils elected from wards and police commissioners, etc. They have said: "This way of doing business is too complicated. When we want anything done, this is too cumbersome. When anything goes wrong we don't know who is responsible. What we want is a board of directors to run this corporation. And we want to be able to get rid of them when they won't do what we, the stockholders want."

The Des Moines Plan which we have already outlined is as follows:

Sec. 7. The council shall have and possess and the council and its members shall exercise all executive, legislative and judicial powers and duties now had, possessed and exercised by the mayor, city council, board of public work, park commissioners, board of police and fire commissioners, board of water-works trustees, board of library trustees, solicitor, assessor, treasurer, auditor, city engineer, and other executive and administrative officers in cities of the first class and cities acting under special charter. The executive and administrative powers, authority and duties in such cities shall be distributed into and among five departments, as follows:

1. Department of Public Affairs.
2. Department of Accounts and Finance.
3. Department of Public Safety.
4. Department of Streets and Public Improvements.
5. Department of Parks and Public Property.

The council shall determine the powers and duties to be performed by, and assign them to the appropriate departments; shall prescribe the powers and duties of officers and employees; may assign particular officers and employees to one or more of the departments; may require an officer or employee to perform duties in two or more departments; and may make such other rules and regulations as may be necessary or proper for the efficient and economical conduct of the business of the city.

Sec. 8. The mayor shall be superintendent of the department of Public Affairs, and the council shall at the first regular meeting after election of its members designate by majority vote one councilman to be superintendent of the department of Accounts and Finances; one to be superintendent of the department of Public Safety; one to be superintendent of the department of Streets and Public Improvements; and one to be superintendent of the department of Parks and Public Property; but such designation shall be changed whenever it appears that the public service would be benefitted thereby.

The council shall, at said first meeting, or as soon as practicable thereafter, elect by majority vote the following officers: A city clerk, solicitor, assessor, treasurer, auditor, civil engineer, city physician, marshal, chief of fire department, market master, street commissioner, three library trustees, and such other officers and assistants as shall be provided for by ordinance and necessary to the proper and efficient conduct of the affairs of the city; and shall appoint a police judge in those cities not having a superior court. Any officer or assistant elected or appointed by the council may be removed from office at any time by vote of a majority of the members of the council except as otherwise provided for in this act.

Sec. 9. The council shall have power from time to time to create, fill and discontinue offices and employment other than herein prescribed, according to their judgment of the needs of the city; and may by majority vote of all the members remove any such officer or employee, except as otherwise provided for in this act; and may by resolution or otherwise prescribe, limit or change the compensation of such officers or employees."

Now the average citizen can easily see from the above extract from the charter of Des Moines, that the five men elected by the people have all the power there is for any city government to have right in their own hands. Each man is responsible for his department and every thing which happens, which is neglected in that department, can be laid at his door. Moreover, when the man is in the daylight and can hide nothing, he is very careful—particularly so when he knows the people can remove him from office. There is a man on the job all the time. And so it happens that when an ordinance needs to be passed, it is done by men who are actually in direct responsibility to the people—even if there were not other provisions for the protection of the citizens beside the Recall. (The Initiative and the Referendum.)

There can be nothing tied up between the mayor, the council and the board of public works in a quarrel between them caused by the jealousy of one for the other.

The result is that the city business is handled quickly and well by the same method that the business of other corporations of millions of dollars is managed.

But remember that these men have power only when the people are satisfied with their work.

Under the present plan business can not be done quickly. The men who conduct the business have not enough power. And the people never get a chance when their interests are in danger.

**Paying For High Protection**

While it is not difficult to name a number of things and several thousand persons of which and whom the New York Sun disapproves, it is hard to find anything which has its absolute endorsement. It is true that at times it has seemed to dislike our divinely inspired tariff, but it has always disapproved still more of anybody who tried to get it reduced. It is, therefore, with gratitude that the following editorial comment is reprinted:

Is there any part of the business of importing that is free from graft? Is there any graft in any part of the business of importing that is not extortive on the part of the sworn servants of the United States treasury?

Is there any ship that comes into our docks that can be unloaded without graft, the same payable to an official of the United States treasury? Does not the bulk of all demurrage charges on our water front depend for its mitigation upon the liberal payment of graft to somebody representing the United States of America?

Here is an entirely truthful exposition of part of the price we pay for high protection. A tariff may stimulate infant industries, and we are more or less committed to the principle that it does so. Unfortunately, if we give one section of the community privileges over another, we upset the balance of our political system to exactly that extent. In fact, we throw the balance out of gear in such a way that it has a tendency to get worse instead of better. The appetite of the protected industry grows with what it feeds on.

This is not the worst of it, and the evils the Sun points out are among the least of those which we have voluntarily brought upon ourselves. The great evil is the terrible deterioration in the quality of what we produce, with the consequent degeneration of the worker who produces it. Ten years ago the Dingley tariff had been in operation for only a short time. All the protection that it could give had doubtless been appreciated, but its demoralizing power had not been realized.

To take a simple instance, if any man will consider any article of attire, say his suspenders, and ask himself how much longer they lasted at the same price ten years ago, he will get an idea of what the tariff has done.

There is no department of industry to which this does not apply. It had, in fact, become so dangerous in the manufacture of steel rails that the railroads had to bring the most active pressure to bear upon the manufacturers in the interests of public safety in order to secure an article upon which had been expended a reasonable amount of time and workmanship.

This is not to say that the principle of protection is bad, but to point out how inevitably it has become corrupted, with the results which the Sun acknowledges. What it has done in the way of debauching our legislators at Washington, no words can tell, and the grim fact still to face is that the evil increases as the years go on. Already our tariff is embroiling us with the peoples with whom we trade. It is rendering our schemes of colonization abortive, and, last and worst of all, it is building up between the East and the West of our country a sectionalism which bids fair to become as bitter as that which existed half a century ago between the North and the South.—Wall Street Journal.

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