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Simplified Municipal Government

By Richard S. Childs.

The recent adoption by Sumter, S. C., of a new type of commission plan of government with the appointive city manager, is important. It is the first time in the United States that a municipal chief executive has been made appointive and put under continuous control instead of independent and under intermittent control.

Pending the appearance in America of this principle, the short ballot movement was headed for a stone wall. For in demanding the reduction of the mischievous multiplicity of elective offices, we are met by the question "what offices would you make appointive and who would appoint them?" The natural and easy answer is to follow the tendency of the times and advocate casting all appointive power on the nearest chief executive. In New York State, for example, the New York Short Ballot Organization has presented constitutional amendments to the Legislature, the effect of which is to give the Governor control by appointment over the rest of the state ticket, namely, the Secretary of State, State Treasurer, Attorney General, Comptroller and State Engineer and Surveyor. It is easy to point to the parallel of the United States Government for justification, or to the state of New Jersey.

The matter of safeguards on the appointive power is brought up. The politician takes it for granted that the State Senate will have power to confirm or reject the appointments of the Governor. The New York amendment, however, recognized the fact that the Senate habitually utilizes the power of confirmation to accomplish a theft of the whole power of appointment. Forthwith, the responsibility of the Governor for the appointments becomes something of a myth, and public control is baffled by the inability of the people to know whether it was the Governor who made a given appointment, or some Senator. For while the number of rejections by a Senate may apparently not be large, the real number of rejections is very large indeed. The Governor may not even informally ask the Senators, or the bills which rule them, if this or that nomination will be acceptable, knowing well the limitations which the politicians will set upon him.

Case of President's Tradition.

The history of the President's appointive power and its restriction by "Senatorial courtesy" shows evils similar to those in New York State. Likewise in cities where the Council must confirm the appointments of the Mayor, an interchange of authority occurs and the Council soon controls the patronage without the corresponding responsibility.

With such cases in mind, the New York Short Ballot Organization drafted its amendment so as to give the Governor power to appoint these minor state officers, without confirmation, and with power to dismiss at pleasure. The amendment, consistent with this principle, went beyond the officers which are now elective and made the Governor's power of unconfirmed appointment complete throughout the whole administration, so far as the constitution was concerned.

The Mayor of New York City has similar power over all the department heads. He may appoint and remove without oversight by anybody, and this is considered one of the most modern and progressive features of the charter.

People Stultify Themselves.

In no other democratic country do the people subject themselves so to the mercies of individual caprice as we already do. And, as I have shown, reformers are ready to carry it still further. In many of our cities it may fairly be said that the Mayor holds half the city power within his personal grasp. Certainly if we take into account his ability to misuse patronage and veto like chessmen, the Mayor comes pretty near being a majority in many of our city governments. In this matter we are unique among the nations, and it is curious that a country which appears most afraid of a strong govern-

ment, and in which the Jeffersonian idea appears dominant, should be the one in which single individuals are entrusted with greater uncontrolled power than anywhere else in Christendom. An instance of the dangers involved in New York City where the Mayor recently had it within his power to upset the subway station whenever he pleased, and frequently it seemed to the people of the town that he was likely to do so. He expressed opposition to what he called "cornfield routes" for subways and wanted the new tubes built where there was already the greatest number of passengers. If that one man had happened to be impervious to argument, future generations in New York City might have been condemned to live upon an insignificant fraction of the land which lay within a few miles of City Hall, with congestion piled on congestion, instead of congestion being relieved by the opening up of new spaces.

Mayor Held Responsible.

Similarly, the Mayor of New York was charged with responsibility for an epidemic of crime, by reason of his causing sharp punishment of policemen who ventured to use their clubs. Matters reached a point where a gang of toughs could successfully forbid policemen to pass beyond the corner of a certain car barn.

After the terrible Asch factory fire in New York, two important bills, aiming at fire prevention, came before the Mayor for acceptance. One represented the best thought of the public spirited citizens of the town and the most careful draftsmanship. The Mayor, without giving anybody a chance to explain, rejected it because he thought his pet enemy, Hearst, had prepared it, and proceeded to sign the inferior measure. The chief ground for complaint against the uncontrolled executive plan is, however, not its perilous strength, but the fact that the presence of these obvious perils compels us to withhold from our administrators the powers they need. They need not only complete undivided appointive power, but power to use their own discretion, power to make new rules, as they go along, to fit new situations, power to be agents instead of dummies of the laws' minutiae.

New York's New Plan.

The New York city government undertakes to prevent such holocausts as the Asch fire. There is a new fire prevention bureau, placed according to current orthodox theories, under the Mayor's single control. The fact that the Mayor is independent and uncontrolled makes it impossible to confer the vast necessary powers upon the fire prevention bureau without running the risk that those vast powers may be used improperly under a weak or opinionated executive, in which case there would be no appeal and all hope of reform must be hazarded upon the personality of the next Mayor.

Upon a state legislature or a city legislature, i. e., a group of men who act in group, we willingly confer greater powers than we dare give one man, and all these large powers can, without diminution, be boldly and flexibly administered through a controlled chief executive.

Such is the new office which has just been created in Sumter, S. C. The new charter of this little city (10,000 population) modifies the commission plan by making the commissioners act as a board, never singly, and perform all executive work through an appointive city manager, who holds office subject to their pleasure. The city manager may be hired from out of town and is simply the expert servant of the commission.

Suppose New York adopted this plan by enlarging its present board of estimate and making it a supreme board of directors with no other elective officers to detract from its authority. That board of directors could hire a chief executive to carry out all its orders in proper co-ordination. There could be under this continuously controlled executive a building code board and a

fire prevention board, for instance, to which could be safely sublet all the powers necessary to the proper regulation of buildings and the prevention of conflagrations. Then the public would have the right to disregard all details and simply hold the directors responsible for results.

Group of Men in Control.

The controlled-executive plan filters everything through a group. It reduces the personal equation. Without loss of administrative unity, it abolishes one-man power. A single man may have his ups and downs, his freaks and fancies, his militant points and his passive ones, his natural bents and moods, his pet departments and projects. A board, or commission, or council, or parliament, has none of these things—to a group such excesses are relatively impossible. Even if all the members were cranks, their combined judgment would be reliable—they would neutralize each other.

This plan corresponds to the general manager under the board of directors in a business corporation. It gives the stability of the combined judgment of many men on matters of policy, but leave execution to a single-headed controlled executive establishment.

The controlled executive plan goes far beyond the recall of the Mayor. Its executive can be bounced out of office in less time that it takes to print the blanks for a recall petition.

There are many other weaknesses of the independent executive plan of government, all of which are corrected by the controlled-executive idea. I will simply name them.

Weaknesses of Plan.

1. The independence of the executive destroys continuity of the administrative policy. One mayor is a crank on finance and taxes, and devotes his attention to improving those matters to the neglect of other departments which do not interest him. His successor leaves the financial reforms uncompleted and follows his own hobby of parks and schools.

2. Election of administrators is unsound in principle, for the choice of an administrator is no more a natural popular function than the choice of an engineer or a landscape architect. Administration of modern cities is an expert's job and the best experts are not necessarily good vote-getters.

3. The independent executive constitutes a separate city government and the attempt to compel him to work in harmony with the other "city governments" creates a costly and cumbersome mass of red tape. The Council, for instance, in appropriating funds for the Mayor to spend, will try to regulate the details of his expenditure, thus perhaps compelling that later in the course of the expenditure may be found to be extravagant or unwise economies or misdirected work.

4. The independence of the executive destroys unity in the government. A city ought to have one government, not several. Pulling and hauling, deadlocks, friction and delays, trading of influence and the need of a boss to hold the ramshead together and make it progress—all result from two-headed government.

Putting a chief executive under continuous control of a responsible group of men abolishes these evils. A moment's reflection will show that it is the universal plan in corporations and in all associations employing paid servants. It is likewise a standard plan in governments outside of the United States.

In foreign countries the parliament elects and controls the prime minister, who in turn controls the administration. The magistrat of a German city, with general power of appointment over the whole administration, is hired by the Council and subject to continuous control by it.

WORKING FOR ORGANIZATION.

General Organizer to Aid in Strengthening Unions in Spokane.

A campaign of organization among the clerks of Spokane is being planned. Clerks of Tacoma and Seattle have recently been helped in their organization work by organizers from the headquarters of the retail clerks' union, and it is stated that within the next few

weeks or so an official of similar capacity will be sent to Spokane.

To the organization campaign that is now being carried on by the retail clerks' union, the union card and label leagues of the whole Northwest and the Pacific Coast are giving their assistance, as these organizations have been working for years to popularize union-made brands of goods and to increase the demand for clerks bearing cards to wait upon members of trades and labor unions.

NOTICE TO CREDITORS.

In the County Court of the State of Oregon for Multnomah County: In the matter of the estate of Mrs. Mary A. Wise, deceased. The undersigned having been appointed by the County Court of the State of Oregon, for Multnomah County, executor of the estate of Mrs. Mary A. Wise, deceased, notice is hereby given to the creditors of, and all persons having claims against said deceased, to present them verified as required by law, within six months after the first publication of this notice to said Thos. F. Ryan, executor, at Room 5, I. O. O. F. Temple, Portland, Or., addressed to Thos. F. Ryan, Salem, Oregon.

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ELECTRICAL WORKERS No. 512—Patton Hall, State street, Mondays at 8 P. M. C. LeRoy Brown, financial secretary, 490 North Nineteenth street.  
PAINTERS No. 724—Dorrance Sign Shop, S. Liberty street, first and third Thursdays at 8 P. M., Ernest G. Burrell, secretary, R. D. 7, Box 62.  
TYPOGRAPHICAL No. 210—Meets first Sunday in each month, 420 State St., Harry H. Hill, secretary, 424 North Front street.

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