

DESIRED CHANGES IN MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT.

It is not the province of this article to deal with every change that might be beneficial in the government of cities, but only with those desirable changes which are susceptible of ready and practical application without attempting any startling revolution either in methods or ideals.

Municipal Government Defective.

All students of the subject are agreed that the government of our great cities is the defective point in American national life and that the evils of the present and dangers of the future, alike, will find their opportunity for growth in the large masses of ill-governed citizenship, congregated in our large cities.

The fact that a general system of government, for all other communities, the most nearly perfect of human governments, should fail of success when applied to the conditions of city life, urges an examination of social and political conditions making such apparently contradictory results possible.

In making this examination the observer will be immediately struck by the fact, that there is in city life a lack of personal acquaintance among neighbors and a want of that sense of mutual interdependence, which, in a small community, exercises such a salutary restraining influence upon the passions and greed of men, and by which the weight of public opinion is given immediate effect.

It is also a feature, constantly to be reckoned with, that the vicious and criminal naturally hive together in our great cities, where every condition tends toward the indulgence of their propensities and where detection is difficult and concealment or flight extremely easy. Their vote is compact, always ready, and always deliverable against good government.

The country official knows the men with whom he deals. The city official necessarily comes into actual contact with very few of the citizens. It is only the citizen with private interests to serve, who makes it his business to keep in touch with the official after election.

Caucus Nomination.

Perhaps the most striking features of city politics is in the methods of nomination. In theory, these methods may be exactly like those of a country convention, in practice they are widely different from it.

In a city convention the actual nominations are invariably made in the caucus of party leaders, before the convention is called to order. These nominations are then ratified by what is known as a working majority of the delegates, few of whom could tell, thirty minutes after adjournment, for whom they had voted.

The caucus is made up of the leaders

from the various wards who are able to "deliver," i. e.: to cast, without question, the entire vote represented by his delegation.

Should the delegation represented by such leader contain one or more men who insist upon thinking and voting for themselves, the ward leader is disgraced because he has failed to have a "solid" delegation. The several ward leaders, with their delegations, are held together by the understanding that each of them will be given some desired nomination or appointment. This nomination is said to belong to such delegation, and the remainder of the caucus or convention never consider the fitness of the individual, but only that the delegation is entitled to such nomination and have signified their choice and that the nominee will probably prove a vote getter. The choice is, of course, the choice of the ward leader or ward boss.

The choice of the voter is in practice confined to one of two men, each nominated by one of the two great parties under the above conditions. Such an official, when elected, owes nothing to those who elected him and all to those who nominated him, and he discharges his obligations along these lines.

Municipal Partisanship.

We have in our cities, as in the state and nation, government by parties, but these parties, being exclusively aligned along national and international issues, their principles have nothing in common with the problems of municipal government.

The struggle between the parties for the control of municipal office is the means whereby party organization is preserved, in years when national issues are not in question. This will not be changed under a convention system, since neither party can afford to ignore local offices as a means of maintaining its party organization.

The great majority of voters will, doubtless, continue to follow one of the two dominant parties. The independent vote can never hope to do more, than hold the balance of power, and this balance of power can not be wielded in the cause of good city government, unless one candidate chances to be much superior to the other, and even in this event the successful candidate will always owe more to the powers that nominate, than to the powers that elect.

Too Many Elective Positions.

One of the most serious obstacles to good nominations, and even with good nominations, to a successful administration, is the choice of too great a number of officials by the ballot.

It has already been shown that the solidarity of a convention majority is assured through the process of trading delegations and swapping nominations. Every additional candidate to be nominated increases the trading power of the

delegation manager. This, in itself, is a serious menace to good government. There is, however, another and more serious result flowing from the election of many officials.

In theory, our government, national, state and municipal, is divided into the three co-ordinate branches, usually designated as the legislative, the executive and the judicial. These three co-ordinate branches, acting each within the scope of its constitutional power, have made the system of national government in America the wonder and admiration of the world. Every servant or officer of the United States, except the executive and the congress, is appointed, and is a subordinate of one or the other of these three branches. The election of such servants and officers would work unending confusion and inefficiency, and this, because each man elected to minor office is himself a petty executive, owing no duty to any superior officer and bringing neither credit nor discredit upon the head of the government by the manner of discharging his duty. The people rarely examine carefully the doings of a minor, elected official during his term of office, and he does, in the main, practically as he pleases. The true theory of government in city life is, as before stated, precisely the same as that of our national government, and the result of violations of this theory, by choosing numerous elective officers, is quite that to be expected. A city attorney, nominated by the trading system, owing many political, and, frequently, financial debts, proceeds to run his office in such manner as to bring the best results to himself. He has no superior officer and is constantly tempted to subvert the interest of his client, the municipality, to his own.

This is equally true of a city clerk and city treasurer, or any other official chosen in the same manner. Even if it be conceded that the mayor will be as bad as his fellow officials, it is better to have one man's dishonesty or weakness to deal with, than that of three or six. There can be no better reason for electing these officials, than there would be for electing a fire marshal or chief of police, or even the rank and file of the fire and police departments. Where large masses of citizens are to put their health, their property and their lives into the hands of men whom they cannot know personally, the number to be held responsible should be as limited as possible and the responsibility clearly fixed upon one individual, who can be made to give a good administration or to get out.

A Practical Civil Service Law.

Given then a mayor with the fullest possible powers over the entire executive department, subject to impeachment in the first instance before the supreme court of the state, for failure to perform his duty, and to immediate removal if