

CHANGING THE CITY CHARTER

Amendments Suggested for the Benefit of the Municipal Statute Book.

THE EVILS OF THE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

Joseph Garneau Wants Houghish Property Owners Placed on the Roll of Taxpayers—Favors Electing All Officeholders—Too Much Shirked of Responsibility.

There is no lack of interest in Omaha's city charter to be made by the coming legislative session. Noting has been done of a very tangible nature, those having the best idea of what is needed feeling it to assume the responsibility of framing the charter in accordance with the plans proposed.

An effort will be made by the committee having the matter in charge to get all the suggestions offered in some tangible shape and then prepare and report the recommended changes to the council, in the hope that the amendments may be agreed upon in Omaha before the meeting of the legislature and thus avoid any squabble over the measure when it comes before the legislature for its consideration.

The suggestions made by various officials and citizens through this Bee last Sunday have been discussed by the committee of the committee, and most of them have met with the endorsement of the body. Other interested parties have offered opinions as to needed changes.

Carter Taylor's Suggestions.

"Your invitation to the public to discuss charter amendments is timely," said Carter Taylor. "The chief difficulty with the Omaha public is that it is not a business, the people seem to prefer to shirk the present duty, as it gives them ample opportunity to display their ability to emigrate. The remedy is to make the city wait until the last moment, then go before the legislature hopelessly divided, and the result is an amendment charter hurried through during the closing of the session, unsatisfactory to everybody. Even those who have been patriotic enough to work for the public have been disappointed. They see the public grinding to sharpen their axes. This time, let us hope that all persons will be forgotten in the general desire for the public good."

"The charter amendments should be discussed in Omaha, not in Lincoln, and the amendments should be before the legislature. Then it will be possible to get the legislative ear, and accomplish something. Therefore the fault has not been with the committee, but with the people. We did not know what amendments were desirable, and our lawmakers took us at our word."

Some time ago, through the efforts of the Real Estate Owners association, a committee of three from the city council, county assessors, and city engineers, and the Real Estate Owners association was appointed and held several interesting sessions and thoroughly discussed the subject of assessments. The committee was composed of Messrs. Wheeler as chairman, and has been waiting for several months for suggestions from County Attorney Mahoney and City Attorney Connelley in answer to the committee's inquiry concerning the legal questions involved. Now that the campaign is over and the county assessors have been elected, they forward their respective letters to the joint committee will formulate a report to be presented to a meeting to be held under the auspices of the officers of the Real Estate Owners association. This report will place the proposed amendments concerning assessments squarely before the taxpayers for consideration. There is no subject which comes closer to the taxpayer than equitable assessments. The present system is unequal, and is a standing menace to the investment of capital and property of the city, and has no defender. As you intimate in an editorial the equity of our citizens is irreparable. They pay hundreds of thousands of dollars into the coffers of the city and county, apparently without a thought as to how their property is assessed, for what purpose, and how disbursed. Even today we witness the spectacle of hungry tax-certificate speculators falling over each other to buy tax-certificate. Taxes ought to be paid, but penalties for nonpayment should be reasonable, within bounds, and the law should favor the property owner, not the tax-buying speculator.

"Other amendments will be considered, and the work should be placed in the hands of the city council, county assessors, and city engineers, and a proper committee sent to our delegates at Lincoln. The city council should have the right to amend the charter, and the city council should have the right to amend the charter. It seems to me that as the proposed meeting must have a recognized head, President Briggs of the Real Estate Owners association is the proper person to call such a meeting. He is a heavy taxpayer, an enterprising citizen, and has made a study of these questions. As the head of the only organized body of real estate owners it seems to me that he can serve the people in no better way than to call such a meeting and push the bottom. The people will do the rest if they are once started on the right track. We have a fine legislative delegation, and the country members have always been willing to give Omaha just what her people wanted. As I said before our citizens have never decided this question. Now is the time, and our taxpayers have the wisdom to agree upon all amendments before the charter is sent to Lincoln. If they will only get together in the right spirit."

Too Many Committments for One Thing.

Mr. Joseph Garneau, Jr.—There ought to be a change in the charter so that one property owner could stand in the way of grading a whole block or two. I know of one case in which a man refuses to raise his house about eight feet and it spoils the grade of four streets. I believe the whole house could be built now for \$2,500, but the owner happens to own a majority of the frontage on this block and his neighbors have to suffer in consequence. The city ought to have power to make improvements like that and pay damages if there have been any. It also ought to be possible to compel property owners to fill up holes, when they are very numerous and unsightly in Omaha. I believe it would be much better for Omaha if it had five councilmen instead of eighteen. I would give each of them \$3,000 a year and expect them to give their whole time to the duties of the city. I think it would be a class of men who would be above the suspicion of boodling, and I think they would give us a better service than we are getting under our present system. More than that, I would elect them from the city at large. Instead of by wards or districts, which would prevent getting into the council following from getting into the council.

What the Park Commissioners Want.

Dr. Miller, park commissioner—The Park commission asks for but one change in the charter. That is an amendment giving the city in unalienable terms the power to condemn land for park purposes, and I understand City Attorney Connelley is preparing a clause that will clear up the doubt about the city's power to exercise the right of eminent domain.

Wants Heads of Departments Elected.

Omaha, Nov. 26.—To the Editor of the Bee: In considering amendments to the city charter, it is not to discuss the advisability of electing heads of the various departments, receiving say \$1,500 or more per annum, by the people direct.

In support of this proposition, I will say that our present system of appointment of the mayor and council certainly places the heads of departments under obligations to the voters that place him in position, and not now nor ever will be, or how much he may want to look after the interests that relate to his attention, the efficiency of the department is curtailed by incompetent subordinates, and a general looseness in the execution of duties.

It may be said that such a change would result in too much politics. Well, what is the difference? As it now is appointments are the result of too much favoritism or perhaps a combine, and if it is only a question of favoritism or politics I believe the latter the lesser evil, and after all we claim this is the government of the people; why not let the people rule?

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ANTHRACITE COAL COMBINE

Testimony Before the Committee Investigating the Reading Deal.

INTERESTING FACTS ARE DEVELOPED

Witnesses Examined Profess Their Ignorance of the Existence of a Combination of Coal Is Restricted.

New York, Nov. 26.—The subcommittee of the interstate commerce committee continued its investigations into the Reading deal. Vice President Holden of the Lackawanna road testified freely as to the companies which met and fixed prices from time to time, but declined to say how the restriction of the output was accomplished.

Mr. Hoehn wanted to know if the witness would have prepared and submitted to the committee a statement showing a full day's work at the mines.

Mr. Holden said he would if he could.

Attended "Fide Water" Meetings.

In reply to a question of Congressman Patterson, Mr. Holden admitted that his company was represented at "Fide Water" meetings, and at these meetings there was neither chairman nor secretary. Such meetings, he said, were rather in the line of conference, and the various companies represented usually acted in concert as a result. There was no agreement between these companies as to what the reduction of the output should be, but they all agreed to do so, though, by which the companies reduced the production to meet the public demand.

Mr. Patterson—Now, do you mean to say that when these companies cause a reduction in the output of anthracite coal each one makes such reduction as it sees fit, independent of the others, and without reference to any other interest than its own?

Mr. Holden—Well, I can only speak for my own company and reply in the affirmative.

Mr. Patterson—You know, though, what the other companies are doing, don't you?

Mr. Holden—Yes, we have a general knowledge of what is going on outside.

Mr. Holden said he did not believe the retail coal dealers had made any extensive profits for some years. Witness also stated that the producers had no agreement among themselves, so far as he knew, by which they agreed to act in concert.

Owing to the speculative element, witness said, there was no particular time for the maximum demand. The demand was greatest in the winter when the consumption is greater, the production is smallest. The coal producers were like summer hotel keepers, and they did not keep open all the year round. Since the existence of the combination there has been no material decrease in the output. In fact, the output for 1892 is the largest ever known and exceeds the output of last year by 1,700,000 tons of anthracite coal. There never was a time, witness said, when the coal business could consume the entire possible output.

A. R. McDonough Testifies.

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Edward H. Meade, president of the Pennsylvania Coal company, testified that his company was represented at "Fide Water" meetings, and that he was a representative and witness thought that on Monday Mr. Meade might be heard. The output of the mine of the Philadelphia Coal company last year was 1,500,000 tons, while this year it is largely in excess of that.

Mr. Meade objected to furnishing the committee a statement of the number of days worked by the miners in the employ of his company since 1890.

Mr. Meade said that they wanted to get at the fact, if it existed, that the companies acted according to agreement in the matter of limiting the production.

When asked what caused the restriction in the production, Mr. Meade said it was occasioned by every crisis that came to the coal business, and he said that he had every reason to believe that there was no agreement by which each company reduced its output proportionately. They limited their output to meet the demand. As long as there was a demand they had the supply.

Then, how is it that these companies reduced their output proportionately simultaneously? asked Mr. Patterson.

"Well," answered the witness, "when there is no demand we limit our production. We know what other companies are doing."

Differences Between the St. Paul-Chicago Roads and the Soo Settled.

Chicago, Ill., Nov. 26.—A settlement has resulted satisfactorily to all concerned took place today between the general passenger agents of the Chicago-St. Paul and General Passenger Agent Hibbard of the Soo line. It was brought about by Mr. Hibbard's complaint that certain Chicago roads were manipulating rates at St. Paul and Minneapolis, and the declaration that unless such practices were stopped the Soo line would be forced to reduce rates between the Twin Cities and the seaboard. Before the hour for the conference arrived the representatives of the Chicago lines met and discussed the situation. They concluded that the steamship agents at St. Paul and Minneapolis were responsible for the whole difficulty, as it is known that they have been reducing rates from those points to New York, largely through commissions paid to them by the Chicago lines.

It was stated that certain eastern roads were paying as high as 87 commissions to steamship agents on business between St. Paul and New York. Furthermore, it was intimated that among the roads paying commissions on such traffic were some that a few months ago were foremost in the Soo line.

After the Soo line representative was admitted to the conference the whole situation was thoroughly canvassed. It was agreed by all that the whole trouble had been brought about by the excessive commissions paid on westbound business, and this must be taken into consideration in seeking a remedy for the evil. A resolution was adopted declaring it to be the sense of the meeting that a committee should be appointed to cooperate with the Soo line and Canadian Pacific in taking up the general question of the demoralization of rates, both east and west, through the agency of agents. As this is a matter in which all the western roads are interested, the appointment of the committee was referred to the Western Passenger association.

The idea entertained by those at the conference was that this is the beginning of an

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Dangerous Experiment of Four Men Traveling Down the River.

THEIR CRAFT WAS CAUGHT IN THE ICE

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The laborers of the boatmen in pushing their craft into the channel called the attention of the laborers in that vicinity to their situation. After considerable labor the boat was again worked back into the current and the trip down the river resumed. At the Union Pacific bridge the scow lodged in the ice near the center pier and remained there for nearly an hour.

The sight of the boat stuck in the ice alarmed some of the men at the Willow Springs distillery and a few moments before a telephone message was sent to the city jail and also to the fire department headquarters, stating that a half dozen men had been wrecked on the ice.

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Farewell Reception.

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