

CONVENTION OF LEAGUE OF AMERICAN MUNICIPALITIES

Birth and Scope of the Organization and Something About the Men Who Will Make the Omaha Meeting One of the Most Important in the History of the League.

MEN who are making history in America will meet in Omaha next week for a convention under the name of the twelfth annual convention of the League of American Municipalities. Mayors, fire and police commissioners, heads of city departments, treasurers, clerks, auditors, engineers, of what America considers the "best cities on earth," will be in attendance and the discussions will be more than profitable to Omaha—they will be the first premier of city government in many ways.

Cities which are conducting their governments along practical reform lines and those which propose new reforms will be placed side by side with those which look toward theoretical forms of city government. Mayors and mayors' policies, burgomasters and their schemes, city fathers and their dreams, will be placed on the operating table and a grand clinic held for the benefit of those interested and all others who care to see and hear the analysis of city governments, which will doubtless portray the progress since the first organization of clans, tuns, villas, burgs, manors and urbs.

In 1907, when the convention was held at Norfolk, Councilmen Zimman, Bridges, Funkhouser and Bedford were sent by Omaha, and by hard work, persistent advertising and boosting by Ak-Sar-Ben and other local organizations, succeeded in getting the convention for Omaha in 1908. The fame of Ak-Sar-Ben had much to do in getting the convention for this city, and the delegates were told that the king would welcome them. For this reason the dates for the convention were set during the time of the festival, and the delegates to the convention of the league will be honored guests of King Ak-Sar-Ben XIV and the princes of his realm.

The meeting this week will be the twelfth annual convention of the League of American Municipalities, the organization having been formed in 1897. The first meeting was held in Columbus, O., and was attended by some two hundred delegates. An organization was perfected by electing officers and adopting a constitution, the first section of which sets forth in succinct language the object of the league, as follows:

"The object of this organization shall be the general improvement and facilitation of every branch of municipal administration by the following means: First, the perpetuation of the organization as an agency for the co-operation of American cities in the practical study of questions pertaining to municipal administration; second, the holding of annual conventions for the discussion of contemporaneous municipal affairs; third, the establishment and maintenance of a central bureau of information for the collection and compilation and dissemination of statistics, reports and all kinds of information relative to municipal government."

Membership is Large

Most of the important municipalities in this country and in Canada have enrolled as members of the league, and its twelve years of service has proven its worth to the municipal official. Whether he represents a village or a metropolis, the newly elected official finds embarrassment in the fact that on many matters of importance, which he is called upon to determine, he is not well informed and that he has no reliable data which will enlighten him. But few cities maintain a department of statistics, and until the forming of the league there was no help for the beginner in municipal government. This is now overcome in a large measure, for the league supplies all municipalities with this important service through the medium of its bureau of information.

The first convention was held at Columbus, the second at Detroit, the third at Syracuse, the fourth at Charleston, the fifth at Jamestown, N. Y., the sixth at Grand Rapids, the seventh at Baltimore, the eighth at East St. Louis, the ninth at Toledo, the tenth at Chicago and the eleventh at Norfolk.

At all of these conventions important subjects have been discussed, and instructive papers, prepared by men of experience, read. Municipal government in every phase has been gone into carefully and an attempt by means of discussion and conference has been made to find out the best means of governing the municipalities, which was left out when the American government was framed.

In a recent address, Governor Hughes of New York said: "The three essentials to successful municipal government are leadership, public opinion and expert service. This leadership must understand politics—the science of government,—if it is to appeal to an intelligent public opinion." The conforming to these three essentials and the understanding of the science of government are the prime motives of the league and its members.

Topics for the Convention

Of the topics to be discussed at this year's meeting of the league, the first one on the program is the most important and is intended to draw out the most discussion. This is that of uniform reports and accounts, the object being to have the reports of various classes of cities compiled so as to make them susceptible of comparison. The committee having this in charge during the year is reported as having been especially active. The committee held a meeting last May in Washington, and with the co-operation of L. G. Powers, chief statistician of the bureau of the census, laid out a plan of action. This plan promises tangible results and assures an exhaustive report on the subject at the convention. The committee will recommend that the schedules of the bureau of the United States census be adopted by the league as a common basis for municipal reporting. This, it is thought, will result in the league addressing a communication to the mayors and councils of American cities, requesting that the budgets as well as the reports of the various departments of cities be formulated, as far as practicable, on the lines of this classification.

Mr. Powers, the chief statistician, will take a leading part in the discussion of the subject of uniform reports and accounts, while the discussion will be in charge of the committee's chairman, Hugo R. Grosser of Chicago. Others who will discuss the question will be Frederick A. Cleveland, technical director of the bureau of municipal research of New York; Comptroller H. F. Hooper of Baltimore, and Mayor James G. Reddick of Norfolk.

Uniform reports and accounts will come up for discussion on the afternoon of Wednesday, September 30.

Thursday morning the topic of consideration will be "Home Rule for Cities." This is a movement to place before the legislatures of the various states the desirability of larger discretionary powers of municipalities in matters pertaining to local government. This will be of especial interest to the people of Omaha at this time, on account of the agitation of the home rule question and the hope of amending the city charter of Omaha to give this city the right to govern itself, instead of being under the legislature.

Omaha, being the host, will have no part in this discussion or in any discussion. The topic will be in charge of Mayor Jacob Heussling of Newark, N. J., and will be discussed by Mayor Robert Lawrence of Middletown, N. Y., Mayor Anthony C. Douglas of Niagara Falls, Mayor John R. Cronin of Joliet and several other prominent men.

Commission Plan of Government

Thursday afternoon municipal government by commission will be discussed, and the Galveston and Des Moines plans of government will be brought up. While he is not on the program, it is probable that John MacVicar of Des Moines, former mayor and at present superintendent of the department of streets and public improvements, will tell of the workings of the Des Moines plan. Mr. MacVicar has been secretary and treasurer of the league for nine years. N. Lafayette Savay of New York; C. H. Huston, superintendent of the department of streets and public improvements of Cedar Rapids; Mayor Henry M. Scates of Oklahoma City, and Mayor W. D. Harris of Fort Worth are on the program to discuss this question.

"The Liquor Problem in the Cities" will be the last subject to come before the attention of the delegates at this year's meeting, it being on the program for Friday morning. Mayor W. R. Joyner of Atlanta will lead in the discussion of this topic; others on the program being Mayor Daniel Lawler of St. Paul, Mayor David S. Rose of Milwaukee, Mayor Silas Cook of East St. Louis, Mayor H. C.

Men Who Will Take Part in Program at Omaha Convention



Shaffer of Rock Island, Mayor J. H. Graham of Wichita, Mayor Joseph Oliver of Toronto and Mayor H. A. Schunk of Dubuque. Friday afternoon the officers for the next year will be elected and the place for holding the 1909 convention selected. Interspersed between the business sessions of the league, the local entertainment committees will show the delegates a good time. The Board of Governors of Ak-Sar-Ben have extended an invitation to all delegates to visit the King's Highway and to make themselves

Part Played by the Button in National Campaigns

IF YOU should ask an authority on campaign buttons how many buttons were being manufactured daily he would tell you at least half a million. This he would consider a conservative estimate—a steady, cheerful production every minute of about 340 smiling little Tafts and grimly meditative little Bryans.

There are three remarkable things about campaign buttons—that so many, many millions of them are put in circulation, that so few of them are visible to the casual observer and that the process of getting them on the market involves a prophetic quality that actually picks the candidate before the conventions have nominated them. On the day that Taft was nominated several million Taft buttons were delivered in Chicago on the day that Bryan was nominated several million Bryan buttons were delivered in Denver. A large share of these buttons had been manufactured as far away as New Jersey. Roughly speaking, they were worth about half a cent apiece at wholesale, and their total value reached somewhere in the neighborhood of \$40,000 or \$50,000—which may well serve as a modest hint at the financial aspect of this apparently trivial business.

Thousands and thousands of dollars in short are thus practically wagered on the opinion of a few individuals as to the outcome of the conventions. The largest company behind these eight or nine million smiling little Tafts and grimly meditative little Bryans guessed right. But some of the other button people guessed wrong. As a result we read soon afterward of a small dealer who committed suicide because he had invested his whole small fortune in the wrong button. He had guessed that Roosevelt and Johnson would be the nominees of the two great parties.

But why, you wonder, should a button man take such desperate chances on anything so doubtful as the result of a political convention? Because the precise moment for disposing of buttons is the moment of greatest popular excitement; the button seller, like the newsboy, aims to profit by catching the crowd even while it is still gazing at the bulletin board. But to do this he must take longer chances. The jobber who orders buttons of the manufacturer assumes all the risk after the buttons have been delivered. The fakir who buys his buttons of the jobber pays on delivery and must stand or fall by his own judgment. The manufacturer who makes up a vast number of buttons in order to be ready to supply the market in competition with other manufacturers at the instant of the rush of orders that follows the decision of the convention must take his chances of

providing himself with a vast number of buttons for which there will be no demand whatever. Naturally the button manufacturer meets this condition in the most economical way possible. He reduces the risk by bringing to bear upon the political situation the keenest available judgment. In one large button factory a salary of \$12,000 a year is paid to the man whose voice is most influential in deciding which of the possible candidates is likely to become the real one, and this man has his several lieutenants who are only a degree less influential. Concerning the future of a national convention it would be difficult to find anything more acutely authoritative than the council of war of a group of these button generals. Each of them, one might fairly say, is a personification of the consensus of political opinion, and yet they are not professional politicians. They are the living proof of the value of such little things as an "if," "but" or "and" in reaching specific conclusions. They are men who travel, who read the newspapers with conscientious avidity, who talk with business men, professional men, politicians and the "man in the street"—and their business is to find out not what men think, but what they feel instinctively about the chances of such and such a possible candidate.

In other words, the wind of politics is too fickle to be determined very long in advance by argumentative discussion and the exhibition of comparative statistics. It can be determined more accurately by instinctive feeling. The button man who has heard "if," "but" or "and" tagged to the name of a possible candidate knows at least that the speaker instinctively feels that certain dangers lie in the way of that particular candidacy, and cares more for this knowledge than for any amount of carefully-thought-out argument one way or the other. He is not interested in the relative value of platforms. He will produce you in due season several million buttons bearing the legend "Vote for Taft and Prosperity," and several million more bearing the legend "Vote for Bryan and Prosperity." But he is busily and delicately accumulating specimens of the political atmosphere of different communities out of which his own instinct and experience will later draw conclusions. The process has its analogy to the chemical laboratory. The instinct of the expert acting on all these accumulated samples of an intangible "something in the air" produces a precipitate of innumerable buttons. An expert in this delicate business, says our button authority, must be born with an instinct for it, and this instinct must be added a wide experience of poli-

tics and humanity in their relation to buttons. This process on a smaller scale is worked out by local agencies of the button manufacturers in the local political campaigns and by the jobbers who make no buttons themselves but buy of the manufacturers and sell to the fakirs. Naturally the risk is smaller for the larger manufacturers because there is more capital to offset inevitable errors of judgment, and in each case a certain amount of capital must be sunk in the preparation of buttons that are bound to prove worthless. The stress of production comes on the favored candidate, but smaller battalions must be held in reserve to represent each of the others. But many a "favorite son" gets much talked of in the newspapers whom no button expert considers important enough to be given one of the preliminary buttons.

These political buttons are merely one item in the button business which originated some thirty odd years ago, not in the rivalry of two presidential candidates, but in the grim determination of one cigarette to drive another out of business. It may or may not be significant, but the cigarette that got the button is still popular and the one that didn't has since practically got the hook. The very beginning of the button business still holds the record for the largest order ever given a button manufacturer. To order a million or more buttons at a time is a commonplace with the managers of presidential candidates, but the reckless cigarette ordered buttons to be manufactured until further notice. Before the campaign was ended millions and millions of them poured over the country on their way to the oblivion that eventually engulfed them. Since then one might almost imagine that the gulf of oblivion has become half full of buttons. But here, in the very beginning, was success as an advertising medium—for the button is but one expression of the enormous triviality known as specialty advertising—that made the idea permanent. Buttons may come and buttons may go, but the idea continues with a steady determination to focus a certain amount of public attention on a specific object—now on a department store, or again on the significance of a trade union label, on the excellence of a brand of beer, on the desirability of this man for sheriff of Podunk county or that man for president of the United States. Nothing is too small or too large to get put on a button; we may announce our political candidate, show ourselves members of the Don't Worry club, hint to whoever may be interested that we "are afraid to go home in the dark," identify ourselves by name and residence, or even, like a knight of old, indicate our

preference for a certain lady. And in this we have a distinct advantage over the middle ages, for ancient chivalry knew not the secret of making a button with the lady's lovely countenance indisputably photographed on it. Designers, and in some cases very able ones, are kept busy all the year around producing the designs. Clipping agencies, maintained by the manufacturers, are everlastingly searching the newspapers for prophetic hints of places where there is likely to be a demand for buttons.

But although the political button is only one among many, the frequency of elections of one kind and another, taking the country as a whole, gives to it something the character of an endless stream that develops once every four years into a raging Niagara. Then the millions and millions of potentially presidential faces come in strips from the printing press, are cut into little round portraits by a sort of mechanical doughnut cutter, are whisked over a disk of metal and under another round sheet of transparent celluloid, fastened in place with a clasp—and there you are ready for the bosom of the potential partisan. "Vote for — and Prosperity" is a motto that fits just as well around the countenance of Candidate Taft as around that of Candidate Bryan—but if the button man has any inclination at all it tends at present a little toward the cheerful Ohlan, for so far Taft enthusiasm seems to be absorbing the larger number of buttons. As for the socialists—confound 'em—they hardly order any buttons at all, even when they are printed in red ink and decorated with a flaming torch. Nor are the prohibitionists as enthusiastic in this matter of buttons as might be hoped of them.

Competition naturally brings into the field at election time a wide variety of buttons for each candidate, but public taste selects from among them with a conservatism peculiar to the season. The political button is a button apart, a button, apparently, to be taken seriously. However decorative may be his designs, the manufacturer receives his largest orders for the simple unadorned portrait of the chosen candidate. Thousands and thousands of button wearers go in for decoration—preferably something with a touch of red, white and blue—but many more thousands and thousands prefer the undecorated portrait. The reason, according to the manufacturers, is that many a man will adorn himself with a political button who wouldn't voluntarily appear in any other kind of a button

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