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The end of a «noble experiment»

BY ROBERT K. CARR



THE good citizens of Cleveland went to the polls November 3, just past. A decision of no little import was to be made, a decision affecting not only Cleveland, but one which could not help but have a far-reaching influence on the future of municipal government throughout the entire United States. For many years Cleveland has been one of the few white hopes in the sphere of local American government. Since the days when Tom L. Johnson and Newton Baker were mayors of Cleveland the voters of that city have had the reputation of exercising a decidedly better than average political intelligence. And in 1921 they justified their claim to that reputation by discarding a rather good city charter which provided for the mayor-council form of government and installed in its place a then relatively new and untried system of government, the city manager plan. Cleveland became the first large American city to adopt this radical innovation and has constantly remained the largest city operating under the manager system.

All this was somewhat astounding because it was one of those rare situations where the advice of political scientists was actually being followed in practice. Political scientists are natural born reformers and while theirs is a young profession, they have not been timid about advocating changes and demanding that certain theories be immediately applied to American government. The direct primary, the initiative and referendum, and the recall, were a few of the battle cries of the students of government of twenty years ago. And these were not faint-hearted cries. They were

shouted from the house-tops. Reformers conducted vigorous campaigns, were dogmatic in their insistence that they alone were pointing the way toward the light, the truth, and the resurrection. And their advice was followed, quite extensively.

Today, students of government are not such a cocksure lot. We are sadly chastened, meek and submissive, and we soft-pedal our recommendations. Dogmas are gone and it plain that the Truth is not so easily discernible. But the political scientist has never entirely retreated from his stand that the city manager form of government is the most ideal plan for American cities, yet devised. But the retreat may be imminent.

The voters of Cleveland have thrown a monkey-wrench into the works. On November 3 by a scant majority of ten thousand votes they rudely cast aside this transcendent form of government and ordered a return to an aged, moth-eaten system which has been receiving the criticism and abuse of scholars for two decades and more.

But this action is not too much of a surprise to anyone who has really been following the course of local government in the United States during the last ten years. True, Cleveland's experiment has lasted eight long years, but there has always been a powerful minority of men in that city constantly working to undermine the system. Four times within the last four years Cleveland citizens have been faced with the question of retaining the city manager plan. Three times they said yes. But the majority in favor of the plan in these elections, never more than five or six

thousand out of an average total vote of one hundred thousand, has been constantly diminishing. No sooner had these ambitious men received the final returns and realized the defeat of their plan, than they would again begin circulating petitions, claiming that the true voice of the people had not been heard in the election just past. It was a spectacle to discourage stout-hearted men. Such are the sins committed in the name of democracy. For what is the Home-Rule plan of the city-state relationship but better, purer democracy?

It was perfectly evident that sooner or later this Cleveland minority would be successful in its aim. And when it was announced that petitions had again been presented to the city clerk and that the issue would appear on the November ballot, the good friends of the city manager plan in Cleveland and elsewhere throughout the country were sorely troubled. For these are difficult times and it is one of the most fundamental axioms of politics that in periods of economic depression, the "ins" will suffer, and the "outs" will prosper.

The fears of these good people were not groundless. The five thousand majority for the manager plan in previous Cleveland elections became a ten thousand majority for the mayor plan.

It is well-nigh impossible to weigh the various influences which brought about this transition of opinion and accord each its relative importance. But we can be fairly certain as to what these factors were. First, the depression. No doubt of that. Cleveland, with its backbone, the much harassed iron and steel industry, felt the crisis early, and it is estimated that one hundred thou-

sand men have been out of work for two years. Two years is a sufficiently long time for trying one's soul and weighing the universe and it was but natural to expect most of these men to act somewhat unfavorably toward a city government which had been powerless to extend any material assistance to them, even though this attitude was stupid and short-sighted.

The second cause is more underlying. In one sense Cleveland has never had the city manager plan. Indeed, the large question becomes—can any great American city hope to find the city manager plan workable in its pure form? (Cincinnati's success notwithstanding.) The city manager system theoretically is a nonpartisan affair. Its *leit-motiv* is that city government is business, and politics, at least of the cruder sort, have no place in business. But the people of Cleveland were not accustomed to getting along for any long period of time without their politics. Under the new plan, they proceeded to elect one council after another on strictly political lines, even though the much overestimated system of proportional representation tended somewhat to obscure the fact that Republican and Democratic lines were just as sharply and bitterly drawn as ever. The Republican machine from first to last dominated every council elected under the city manager charter. The Republican boss named the first city manager. Indeed, speaking during this last campaign in which he bitterly opposed former city manager Hopkins who had now become a candidate for the council, he made the astonishing admission—"This is the true Hopkins, false, spurious, hypocritical, treacherous; poseur, and phrase maker; a man whose inherent propensity for deception has *put him back on the sidewalk where Gongwer* (the Democratic boss) *and myself picked him up in 1923.*" A frank and candid utterance to say the least! And when Cleveland newspapers, raising a great hue and cry, influenced council to reject this boss's first and second choices for the second city manager, they failed to prevent the acceptance of his third choice.

All this did not serve to win more friends for the city manager plan in Cleveland and it thoroughly alienated those Democrats who were left out in the cold as far as the ten thousand city jobs were concerned. Under the first city manager, by agreement with the Republican boss they did receive thirty-three per cent of these positions but that treacherous bargain was ended when this boss decided to put city manager Hopkins "back on the streets." The Democratic party in Cleveland, as in nearly all large northern cities, is a

powerful organization, (I myself have heard the Republican boss say that Cleveland is Democratic) and when the Democratic boss gave the word in this past election to vote against the city manager plan, this plan which had kept them clad in dirty rags and beating at the doors of the city hall until their hands bled, the fate of Cleveland's "noble experiment" was sealed.

Of course, the city manager plan proponents may now adopt the same policy toward the mayor plan, which its enemies have used during the last eight years. But I am afraid that these people lack the organization and efficiency possessed by their enemies. History does not repeat itself, we are told, and certainly it would seem that the city manager plan, betrayed by Cleveland voters, besmirched with the mud and filth thrown by Republicans and Democrats, (even Newton Baker allowed the Democratic organization to use his name in their selfish, partisan arguments) is through as far as Cleveland is concerned.

A heartrending and utterly discouraging state of affairs! The new charter adopted on November 3 provided with an element of grim humor that the city manager and all his forces must clean off their desks, sweep out their offices and vacate the city hall within four days! On November 9 Cleveland government began to function under a charter championed by a lawyer, one Saul Danaceau, whom few knew anything about, a charter which returns to the ridiculous ward system of council selections, increases the size of the council to thirty, shears it of much of its power, creates a very strong executive position, for which several indifferent candidates have already appeared—men recalling a sorry past about which Cleveland hoped it had completely forgotten, including one politician who painted all the city property a flaming, obscene orange, stopping short only of the city hall! Cleveland's two city managers, whatever may be said against them were so far superior to these ex-mayors that one shudders to think what Cleveland may be in for.

When the constitutional convention met in 1787 it set up a form of government which has been much extolled, but it created a political system which to my mind hardly deserves the unqualified praise which has been bestowed upon it. I refer, of course, to the doctrine of Separation of Power, Checks and Balances, in our national government. Interfering seriously with the workings of our central government, as if that were not enough, this system has invaded the sphere of state and local government. The mayor-council form of city government is nothing

more nor less than a weak brother of our national system of government.

This is the plan to which Clevelanders have returned. They will have the privilege of witnessing locally the same futile, fruitless battles between the mayor and the council that they have been watching many years between president and congress. Perhaps Cleveland citizens grew weary of watching a council which controlled the executive and over which there hung no threat of the veto of an angry mayor. If so, they will doubtless soon enjoy the spectacle of a mayor and a council fighting it out, round after round.

It is not for me to say whether this action of November 3 will mean the end of the city manager plan from a national viewpoint, especially in so far as large cities are concerned. Detroit, Philadelphia, and Toledo, to mention only a few, are all toying with the idea of adopting the plan. If the Cleveland debacle doesn't actually scare them out, at least it may indicate that there is no reason to suppose that these cities will have any better luck with the plan even if they do adopt it. If the Cleveland electorate couldn't play its rôle, I can't quite see boss-ridden Philadelphia, or industry-bound Detroiters succeeding where Clevelanders failed.

The tragedy of the whole situation is that Cleveland had far better government during the eight years of the city manager plan than it did in the preceding eight years under the mayor plan. And the same would probably be true of most American cities, even though it seems impossible to prevent the manager plan running afoul of political machines. But the difficulty lies in keeping the electorate of a city constantly convinced of that truth. Cleveland, today, is a progressive city, in spite of the November 3 election. I believe that it is a better place in which to live than the average American city and it is well on its way toward solving many of the complex, troublesome problems that all great cities face. Civic improvement has gone on apace and Cleveland is rapidly becoming a beautiful city. The progress made in the development of a civic center of public buildings after twenty years of inactivity alone justifies calling the city manager plan a success in Cleveland. True, there were mistakes, not the least of which was building a three million dollar municipal stadium expecting to lease it to the Cleveland major league baseball club on completion but failing to arrange the lease terms before beginning the work. Today the 80,000 seats remain empty but the interest on the \$3,000,000 goes steadily on.

The elections in Cleveland and Ohio

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bility of its own virtue, restrains them from ever uttering a dissentient cry. The fire of indignation within them burns into a bitter ash, and frustrated by the conflicts of their own natures they crawl into oblivion or throw themselves from their penthouse into the streets below.

Nor, in fact, has any cry which can be heard above the cacophony of the street been uttered by the churches, from which in other times issued the fires of moral wrath and righteous condemnation. The largest church in New York of the faith of John Wesley, instead of crying the words of that reformer through the city streets, is preoccupied with the construction of a Byzantine edifice that would appall the spirit of that zealot. The Episcopal builds a great cathedral, while Thomas à Becket is daily murdered by the spiritual followers of Henry II. The Catholic church, with its denial of the individual conscience, is, of course, too far absorbed in abstractions even to take cognizance of the battle of moral values that is in progress.

It would seem to be from the small town, the immigrant from the country, with his narrow-minded and Victorian views, his rude philosophy that knows no inner conflicts, that the first dissentient note in this pæan of tolerance ad cælum might be heard. Unfortunately, these country immigrants upon whom the city relies for its new blood and stimulus are too frequently cowed by its majestic proportions and vast movements to retain their intellectual energies. Indeed, so apt are they, so quick to discard the attitudes of their youth, that frequently they lead the way and set new examples of tolerance for their masters to emulate. Not only do they learn their lessons well, but like evangelists of a new gospel, they spread the message homeward. Aided by the movie, the metropolitan journal, and the hard road, they carry their doctrine back to their villages, with the result that here, as in the cities, the power of indignation, of righteous wrath, the burning fire of moral reform, is gradually dying out.

It is growing evident that the country needs a return to narrow-mindedness, that a certain Victorian conventionalism might not be a bad ingredient in the national potpourri. It is not necessary to make historical or geographical excursions into other lands and times to demonstrate the value of a balance between the rural and metropolitan elements of a society, to dilate on the nourishment given the Roman empire by its countless Iberian villages, or to cite the contemporary influence in French national life of the provincial as opposed to the Parisian. Nor is it necessary to discourse on the headlong rush of country blood to the cities that has been going on in America, or the counter movement of urban civilization, via the movie, the radio and the press, into the country districts. It is apparent to all that America is becoming more

and more homogeneous, morally and intellectually, that the diversity of viewpoint, of mode of life, of expression and attitude, is rapidly succumbing to mass civilization. It is needful only to call attention to the pernicious effects of a single philosophy carried to extreme and universally adopted. We are in danger of absorbing a new Nicene Creed and universal philosophy—without the bloodshed or revolt that accompanied that spread of doctrine—and absorbing it with an ease that too surely suggests a complete stagnation of the national intellect.

We need at least a strengthening of that element which is not afraid of decided views of morality and ethics. It would seem that it is to the villages, the strongholds of conservatism, where travelling evangelists are still known, where mid-week prayer meetings are still attended, that we must turn. The villages can restore this balance to a world gone mad on liberalism by retaining their conservatism, by not trying to ape the ways and manners of the big cities, and by sending forth their sons well equipped with character possessed of iron inflexibility.

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THE END OF A "NOBLE EXPERIMENT"

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reveal one or two other results worth mentioning. Cleveland voters, famed for their socialistic tendencies (they delivered the city to LaFollette in 1924, to their everlasting glory) refused for the first time to approve a bond issue to increase the capacity of the city light plant. But in this respect abuse should not fall on Cleveland voters. Blame, instead, Ohio farmers. These worthy men, controlling the Ohio legislature and taking their cue from their brethren in Illinois have consistently blocked all efforts toward facilitating progressive government in metropolitan areas of Ohio. One of their little jokes has been to require that all bond issues of the type Cleveland was considering, must receive a sixty per cent majority to pass. A majority of Cleveland voters favored this improvement of the municipal light plant, a plant the very existence of which has forced the private utility also furnishing the city with electricity to give the lowest rates extended to any large American city today. But the insidious propaganda circulated by this private company had its effect and the majority fell short of the required sixty per cent.

Masillon, Ohio, attracts the attention of the country by electing as its mayor none other than Jacob Coxey of "Coxey's Army" fame of nearly forty years ago! The man evidently flourishes in time of economic crisis. He waited a long time for his comeback!

In matters of general statewide concern, Ohio voters did a bitterly tragic thing. They defeated by a vote of more than two to one, a \$7,500,000 program to improve the penal institutions of the state, a program instigated as a direct result of the Ohio penitentiary fire in which some three hundred men literally roasted to death. So quickly do men forget! Here is one of the most scathing denunciations of the workings of democracy of which I can conceive. Shortly over a year ago the people of Ohio were shocked by a grim, horrible tragedy and demanded immediate activity in improving the penal institutions of the state. I find it difficult to conceive in what frame of mind these Ohio voters went to the polls. Do such people have a right to participate in government?

Summarizing those phases of the Ohio election on which I have touched, we have poor Coxey as the sole credit, the mayor plan vote in Cleveland, and the defeat of the light plant and penal institution bonds as our debits. With all due respect to Coxey I am afraid that the debits far outweigh the credits.

So functions democratic government in one great American commonwealth.

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SPORTS OF ALL SORTS

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as compared with \$26,000 in 1930 and \$46,000 in 1927. About \$17,000 was taken in gate receipts compared with \$35,000 in 1930.

The attendance follows

	1931		1930
Rice	4,400	New Mexico	4,000
Iowa State	4,400	Nebraska	6,200
Kansas	8,200	Kans. State	8,600
Okla. Aggies	3,500	Missouri	6,500

A contributing factor last year to the smaller receipts is the fact that the gate price was \$1.00 as compared with \$2.50 previously.

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Harrier captain

Ralph Dale, '33 arts-sc., of Enid, was elected captain of the harriers November 19.

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Fencing

For the first time in the history of the university, private fencing classes are open to students. They are being taught by Mr Ralph Shaw, former student of Carnegie Institute of Technology, Pittsburgh. Most of the participants are students in the school of dramatic art.

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Financial situation

The situation of the athletic association was reported to be critical as the new year began. The association must pay a \$10,-