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THE CABINET SYSTEM--AN IDEAL GOVERNMENT.

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INTRODUCTION.

Forms and systems of government have ever been an important factor in promoting the welfare of the subjects or citizens. In early days under good rulers, and in later times under favorable systems, the development of the masses has been marked, while under less favorable governments, progress has been retarded. But as the people have advanced in civilization the systems of government have necessarily changed to meet the new conditions. Each system as it has proved successful for its age gave promise of being an ideal form, but in time it also proved inadequate to the demands and was replaced by another.

After twenty five centuries since first the free-men of Greece established popular self government, this general system has come to be recognized by all the civilized world as the only right and tenable form: and while most of the governments still preserve much of the pomp and show that is the essence of royalty, each of the nations of the earth that is worthy the name has given the people a large and increasing, or else entire control of political affairs. This fact realized, the only question now at issue by the students of political science is one of practicability--how best and surest, and possibly quickest, to secure the sober judgment of those who are recognized as competent to participate in the affairs of state.

The varying requirements because of the moods and temperaments of the different races have made it impossible that any one type is equally well adapted to all, but as each nation progresses in the science of government it is plain to be seen that the development is along two distinct lines. One system is indirect as regards the people, and is rather a government of the few, acting according to their

own judgment, but by virtue of delegated powers. This is the theory developed by the founders of the Presidential system of the United States. While in some practices, as in the method of election of the President, we have made a partial departure from the theory, our government is the best example of the system. The other is more democratic in form, and seeks to secure the direct and exact judgment of those who have been admitted to the electorate, and to make that judgment binding upon the lawmaking and administrative bodies. The English Parliamentary system, independent of the King and the House of Lords, is the most notable example.

As many changes are being wrought in our own government, and many more are constantly proposed, it is important for us to study the two methods to determine which one is more nearly the ideal, to the end that whatever changes may be necessary in our system shall be towards this ideal and in harmony with it rather than away from it. For the present, then, let us suspend our commonly accepted ideas that this country has the best form of government so far devised, and as if we were visitors from another world, take up the theory and actual experience of the two schools and see if one is not better adapted for a really free people than the other.

Making our definitions to start with: an ideal government for a free people is that form which responds most easily in the enactment and administering of laws to the judgment of that people.

A free people are those, not only unrestrained by any superior force, but who also are really competent to manage their own affairs. For those people not yet entirely competent to have their will enacted into law, the Presidential system may be better adapted, or the Cabinet system must be modified to be applicable to the special conditions.

The Cabinet system is a conduct of government by administration by a committee of the legislature, who formulate the desired laws, steer them through that body, and administer them after enactment. The striking feature of this system is the absolute accountability of the cabinet to their creators, and the consequent uncertainty of the tenure of office. The result is necessarily harmony between the legislative and executive branches, or else resignation or dissolution, and a readjustment that will be harmonious.

The Presidential system is an administration of laws by an executive, advised by a cabinet of his own choosing, suggesting new laws but hardly daring to insist on them, wholly independent of the legislative branch except for criminal offence, elected by the people, and serving for a fixed period. The striking feature is the lack of direct responsibility to any power except his own conscience, and perhaps a fear that he must not depart from the path that the public has marked. The result is a continual jealousy between the two branches and often friction that retards legislation until after the next general election.

These two systems may be illustrated by two forms of business organizations with which all are familiar--the joint stock company and the regular private corporation. The former, like the Presidential system, has the board of directors (corresponding to the legislature) elected by the stockholders (corresponding to the citizen-voters), and also the officers (executive) elected by the same voters. Like the Presidential system, each branch is independent of the other, looks to the same source (the membership) for authority, and in questions of policy subject to difference of opinion, and liable to prove an effectual check upon each other. The latter has the board of directors elected by the members, and these directors now have entire

Charge of the business of the company. They elect and discharge the officers at will. The executive is thus bound to do the will of the master--the board--and the only recourse in case of difference is to appeal the question direct to the membership.

In some respects this illustration may seem inapt, but it is clear enough to present the two systems at a glance, even though it would be unjust to judge of governments by the results of the same systems as applied to business. It is significant to add however, that almost without exception, the joint stock company is recognized as a business failure. In contrast with this, the private corporation is the marvel of this age of wonders. It has made all our modern commercial life a possibility. It can do the things that no one person can reasonably expect to do, because it combines the wisdom of many; and on the other hand, it has the executive ability of the most capable individual that money can command. It is no argument against the system to show that the corporation by heartless and illegal acts is a menace to our public institutions. Rather this very capacity is a powerful argument for its efficiency, and if these corporations, the creatures of the state, should ultimately prove stronger than the state as at present constituted, then logically, the most effective method of control should be to inaugurate the same system in affairs of state.

ADVANTAGES. I RESPONSIVENESS.

Taking up now the main thought, which is to examine the Cabinet system in detail, this can best be done by making comparison at each successive step with the other system with which we are already familiar.

An examination of the theoretical workings of the system will at once show its simplicity and responsiveness to the will of the electorate. The elections are held at no fixed time. When there

is a difference of opinion between the lawmakers and the executive on some vital question, the executive is forced to do one of two things. It may resign and let the legislature select a new cabinet, or else it may dissolve the legislature and appeal to the country. This latter course is for the purpose of securing the expression of the voters on the issue before them. There is no excuse at this election to introduce outside issues. Each candidate favors or disapproves the proposed measure. The election over, the majority of the new house have the duty of enacting the proposed law. They select the cabinet from their own number with instructions to do certain things. The cabinet must frame the proposed measure to make it accord with constitutional rights and precedents. They present it to the house, and are there to defend it and to aid its passage. If there is a division of opinion among the majority on some minor point, then a caucus must be held in order to get together, or else run the risk of the minority party siding in with one faction. Finally, after the law is passed, the enforcement rests with its friends, the authors. If it has not a fair trial, its supporters are to blame.

In actual practice this theory may fail. Third parties may break into the legislature, and with a special cause to promote, effect a coalition with the minority. Again the party in power may choose the time most opportune for securing the verdict of the country in their in their favor, at which to dissolve the legislature and secure a new election, or they may force an issue out of some minor question in order to get a new lease of power: but any or all of these points which may be advanced, only postpone the contest on the real issue until such time as the country really wants it settled.

Contrasted with this simple and responsive system is the indirect one with which we are acquainted in the United States. The

original theory of the founders that men and not issues should decide the election, and that the men elected should use their own judgment in the enactment of laws, has been modified by practice until we try to elect on the issues. But the result is much the same as was intended. The elections come at stated intervals whether there is any particular issue at stake or not. The two main parties do not divide on any one question but on many, though one may be paramount to the others. The voters must therefore choose between parties rather than particular issues--endorsing many questions which they dislike in order to express themselves on others. No platform of a dozen planks can meet the entire approval of even a single thinking voter. Then there are local conditions continually arising to affect the action on the greater questions. It is commonly believed that the Southern states have never expressed an impartial judgment on any national question, because of the fear of negro domination in their own states. Then parties, personal feelings, district improvements, and other local issues all have an influence in blinding men to the great questions.

Supposing though, as is generally the case, that after years of agitation, that part of Congress, the House of Representatives right from the people is generally agreed on some measure of public sanction, it is but the beginning of the legislative struggle. The Senate, unlike the House of Lords in England, does not sit principally as a matter of form and soon pass any important measure that is sent up to them, but seeks to decide the question for itself, in its own way, and in its own time. In theory representing the states, but in practice representing nothing but their own convictions (unless the commonly accepted opinion, that they represent certain influences called "the interests", is true) they are nevertheless an effective check upon legislation. But the existence of this body is not necess-

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arily an essential to the system and should not be charged up to it, unless it be held as a third party to decide between two otherwise incompatible branches--the executive and the House. But the President elected by the same constituency as that of the House, but often at a different time, and exercising a veto power, without being responsible to any one, makes the radical difference, as explained in the definition, from the other system. If this one man feels bound to a party that has since been driven from the House, or if he considers his judgment of more weight than that of the country, then he is there to veto adverse legislation, or hinder its enforcement, if enacted. All this may be desirable in this country, but it is certainly contrary to the theory that the will of the people should be the law of the land.

II STABILITY.

A second general advantage of the Cabinet system is the stability of government which it promotes. The most general serious menace to modern governments is due to corruption of the public officers. This practice has made our American cities the most notorious if not actually the worst governed of any in the world. Corruption caused the conditions that brought on the Russian--Japanesse war, and brought defeat to the Russians and disrepute and ultimately, overthrow, to the Aristocracy. No government has entirely escaped its cancerous growth, and very many have succumbed to it. Any system that tends to shield its practice is so far unstable, for violent means will be used if necessary to root it out, while any system that minimizes the danger is that much more certain of continued life--as certain as disease will send a man to an early grave or preservation of health will tend to longevity.

What opportunities then do these two systems offer to those commercial interests which are continually at work to conduct

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nefarious practices? So far as the legislature is concerned, any form of remuneration for questionable practice would be unprofitable for the corruptionists, providing the purchased legislation was liable to an immediate repeal. We can hardly conceive of city councils voting away valuable franchises in the face of public sentiment, when that very act might mean the dissolution of their body and the holding of a new election. In the case of bribery of officials, this would hardly seem possible when each held office at the will of the legislature and was liable to discharge with scarcely a hearing in his own defence. Whatever may be said of the corruptors of our public life, they are no fools. And it is safe to assume that the incentive to purchase favors will suddenly fail when it is demonstrated that those who are paid the price cannot deliver the goods. How far this theory holds good in actual practice may be a matter for difference of opinion and hard to settle satisfactorily, but according to our own experience in business life and the undisputed improvement in England as the cabinet system is more fully developed, we affirm that the responsibility to particular and certain parties will tend to discourage corruption among public servants.

III ALERT ELECTORATE.

The tendency of the cabinet system to react upon and develop the character of the electorate is one of its most commendable points. People like officers are sobered by responsibility. As long as they may secure change or reform in government by legal or peaceful means, there is no excuse for mob violence. Then when they actually have the power to do things, they will stop to consider the consequences before carrying out the threats previously made. On no other hypothesis can be explained the extreme conservatism of the English people, and the radical actions of the French during the days of the Revolution.

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✓ To those who have watched the affairs of our cities go from bad to worse nothing is more disheartening than to see the indifference of those who are being despoiled and robbed, and know it, and have the power to remedy matters but do not use it. But a little consideration will show how monstrous is the task. It takes desperate conditions to arouse all the people to act together, and nothing short of this will make any difference. The wave of reform sets in with a majority vote, but that is not momentum enough to carry it along. Officers are unfaithful or else prove incompetent, and there is no remedy till the next election. The press points out the failure in the administration, but what is to be done about it? Nothing at all--till the next election. By that time the people have relaxed interest, or the party machine is able to get out the vote and the old conditions return. Under such circumstances each man feels that it is a waste of time to take an interest in public affairs; that he had better attend to business and make up in other ways what he loses by mismanagement of public affairs. Each one thinks he can stand it if the rest can, and if the others will not do anything, why he will let it rest. Only when conditions reach such a state that a vital question is inevitably projected before the public right on the eve of an election is there a reasonable chance for reform. The public feels that it has a chance now and sets about to do things. It is all worth while for they have the power. Everybody is interested because he knows everybody else is. And the results are seemingly remarkable. Within a year of this writing, of our American cities, Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, Milwaukee, and Newark have passed through this very experience. But the awakening is not remarkable. It came according to an inevitable law. Hitherto, the forces of corruption had kept the people divided by false issues, but conditions reached such a state that their record could not be

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suppressed at election time, and the overturn was a possibility. The lesson to be gained from this is obvious. It is not to let things run so far that the issue cannot be suppressed at election time, but to make it possible to hold an election whenever there is an issue. This will have the desired effect upon the character of the public. They will be always alive to guard their interests because it is worth while. As to actual results, we find that the House of Commons elected for seven years has served its time out but once in a hundred years, and has been forced to face a new election on the average almost as often at the House of Representatives in this country--once in two years, but with this difference, that possibility of an election at any time tends to keep the electorate awakened at all times. And so we have developed because of the cabinet system, an alert constituency.

IV HARMONIOUS LAWS.

Another commendable feature possible only in the cabinet system, is the harmony of the laws. At this time there is pending before the American Congress the hardest fought battle for a legislative measure of a generation--the railroad rate bill. To show the confusion and uncertainty, not an advocate of the measure but has been publicly denounced by other advocates as an enemy in disguise. The most prevalent charges are that the guilty one who is favoring the bill as a whole is supporting some clause that will make the measure so radical it cannot pass, or else will cause it to be declared unconstitutional by the courts; or else will emasculate it will amendments. As a matter of fact, no one is responsible for the bill in its present form, and no one would care to be known as the author. The enemies of effective legislation may be opposing this measure for a blind in order to keep the supporters from passing more stringent laws, while the President and the friends of railroad regulation seem to feel that this law, at best is but a step, and that further legislation must soon

follow. How different the experience of England, where the greatest experts of the country, acting under instructions of the cabinet, frame and word the proposed law so that there can be but little chance for misconstruction by the courts, and where such a thing as a "joker" is impossible; and where after all the only question that the courts have to decide is what the authors of the law intended.

V. BUDGET CONTROL.

A fifth point--the strict control of the budget--is advanced by the advocates of the cabinet system, though perhaps this is not necessarily a feature exclusive to this. The financial secretary must approve the particular items of every appropriation bill, which serves as an effectual check upon the practice that permits each member with a pull to secure an interest in the public funds. The ministry being thus responsible for the appropriation of money, are naturally more careful than they otherwise would be, and the opponents are quick to seize any opportunity to create an issue. It might be in place to add right here, that the same result would probably be accomplished under the other system, by giving the executive power to veto particular items in any bill carrying appropriations.

EXPERIENCE OF NATIONS.

After this extended discussion in favor of the theory of cabinet government it may be well to refer briefly to the experience of those nations which have given it a trial. Japan, in reorganizing her government some twenty years ago, with the thought of giving the people a large measure of power, sent a commission abroad to investigate and report on the different systems. The one finally adopted is almost identical with that of England. The remarkable success of this nation in the late war is largely attributed to the centralized yet representative power which her administration exercised.

As furnishing the fairest test under similar conditions, the people of Spain and those of the South American republics are of the same nationality, and still hold to the same religion and ~~to the~~ business methods. The republics, with the Presidential system, are notoriously unstable. Not a nation but has had a series of revolutions or rebellions; not a month but an armed struggle is on in some one of the countries. In Spain, the government by the cabinet is able to weather all storms. The nation recovered from the disasters of the American war without even a change of ministry. Since then the country has made rapid strides in internal development, and now her government has the entire confidence of the financial centers of the world.

In the plans for the new form of government in Russia, the cabinet system is the only one to have received serious consideration, and is now on trial. So far it has had but little chance, and the struggle may yet be between the supporters of the old order and the advocates of socialistic republic, but neither can permanently succeed, and it is only a question of time till the cabinet system must be adopted for the needs of that unfortunate half-free people.

The experience of France seems peculiarly adapted to show the actual workings of the two systems. Two former republics were patterned after the American plan--the executive having considerable power independent of the legislative. In the First Republic, the committee of five, and in the Second Republic, Louis Napoleon, were able to usurp all the power, and change the form of government. This was perhaps possible because of the temperament of the people--erratic, hot-headed, passionate, and flighty of thought and action. But how about the Third Republic? This has been formed with all power vested in the legislature and cabinet, and the President more of an ornament than any conspicuous use. For thirty years, policies of administration

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have changed from one thing to another, parties have rose and fell, cabinets are made and unmade in a night, enemies of the Republic proclaim their sentiments from the housetops and vote their ticket at the elections, but the government is growing stronger and more stable with each passing year.

But these instances only show that the cabinet system is suited to the needs of people not yet entirely competent to manage their own affairs, and who must be dependent upon a strong central government partly controlled by the superior class. But if it is the ideal form for leading people out of darkness and teaching them to be self-dependent, it is no less satisfactory when adapted to the people who claim the entire control of their political affairs.

Thus it has remained for England to develop the system to the fullest extent thus far attained. The Anglo-Saxon has for centuries been the prime mover in the establishment of representative government. The English parliament has been the scene of many fierce battles for popular rule long before the time of the American revolution. The independence of America and the establishment of the republic was possible because its founders were of the race that had stood for free government, and also because the subjects of King George III were only half-heartedly supporters of the temporary policy of oppression to which his ministry was committed. But it was not till after the Napoleonic wars that the system was able to show what was possible, and since that time the advancement of England at home and in commercial expansion and in colonization of remote countries has been a wonderful story. While the cabinet had long represented the governing body of England, it was not till 1832 that the suffrage included the great middle class, and as late as 1887 before the great body of citizens were admitted to the electorate. Until this last date, the English system

is more of an example of efficiency in administration and progress in definite reforms: since then it shows the same efficiency under a pure democratic government. In these years her tariff policy has been consistent and fair to her own subjects and to her colonists. Most of the colonies have enjoyed complete self government, modeled after that of the mother country, saving the expense of a navy and without paying taxes to the home country. Her civil service law permits of a change of less than fifty officers of government when there is a change of administration. All the rest serve as long as performing efficient service. There seems to be little of public scandal connected with its administration of the army or the colonies. During the past year it has passed through a crises in government, due to a complete change in public sentiment, and while there may be many radical laws enacted, there is not a sign of a commercial panic, that invariably follows such a change in this country. In spite of the opposition of the powerful land owners, the government has provided for the condemnation of the large estates in Ireland, and the sale to the landless class. It has inaugurated vast public enterprises in India and Egypt for the betterment of conditions there. And finally, as evidence of stability, and showing how well the masses are suited with the form, there is no agitation by that class who claim to be the foes of all government--the anarchists. In proportion as a government represents the people, the work of this crowd is fruitless. Then there is the Canadian government right on our side, that has the cabinet system in complete working order, and it will be the most fruitful field for study of any.

CONCLUSION.

At the close of this paper we would feel that our efforts were fruitless did it not suggest some direct benefit that may come to our own country. We do not imagine that the cabinet system should replace our present form, even if the public were favorable to it. How-

ever, as stated at the beginning, we are constantly making changes in our system, and if we have in mind an ideal, then the changes will be more easily made, and will more likely give better results, if in harmony with that ideal. In a general way then, we conclude that the legislature should be made more representative of the judgment of the public, and that the jealousy between the legislative and executive branches can be gradually adjusted in favor of the legislative. To attain these ends, let us outline some of the specific problems which we now face, and suggest a solution that seems to be in harmony with the ideal.

The most important one just at present is a change of method of election of the United States senators--making them represent some tangible and definite constituency, rather than a state legislature that has adjourned before their own terms is hardly begun.

The primary system for the nomination of candidates, seems to aid in securing popular favorites for office, rather than men who can best manipulate caucuses, and should have a thorough trial.

Some adequate means for retiring public servants when for any reason they are no longer in sympathy with the popular demands, would solve a lot of secondary problems. Even though the means should never be used, the possibility would make the servants more careful of their conduct. Los Angelus and some other cities have some such a system on trial, and it should be watched with interest.

A direct vote of the populace upon the laws of the state or nation is impracticable, but if important issues are at stake, and no adequate method is at hand for securing a legislature elected on this issue, the people of right should have a direct vote. This would be especially applicable to cities having the granting of franchises or other favors.

The taxation laws, to be fair, should tax a man on the

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value of the property which the government protects, or at least on his ability to pay, rather than on the size of his family; or what amounts to the same thing almost, the consumptive capacity of his family. This would mean the replacement of the tariff tax, by one on incomes, or on land or other property values. But it would take a broad construction, or a change of the constitution to do this.

But it is in the matter of our city governments, that the theory of centralized responsive government is open to a fair and impartial trial. The failure of the present system, patterned after our national system, has been so marked, that people everywhere are looking for a change. In its hour of extremity following the flood disaster, Galveston adopted what was called a commission system, combining in five elected officers, the functions of legislative and executive. The remarkable success has caused other cities to try the plan, and it promises to cause a revolution in our city governments. An examination will show that it is practically the same as the cabinet system, except that there is no provision for a dissolution of the body and the calling for a new election. But for efficiency of administration, and responsibility for use of power, it should be especially satisfactory. And it is from the experience in city government that the people of the whole country will be enabled to profit, and in the course of years to build a better, stronger, and more representative government, than any of which the world has yet dreamed.

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