

Municipal Reform
Bradford Dougherty Class '96

Commencement Thesis
of
Bradford Doughty Class of '96
Subject-Municipal Reform.

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Municipal Reforms.

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The subject of Municipal Reform is one of world wide interest at the present time. All over this and foreign countries in all cities and especially the larger ones, there is some movement on foot for the bettering of the public affairs in the city. It seems to be a time of moral awakening when many of the forces are putting their best efforts forth for the advancement of right in political affairs.

Previous to this time there have been many reforms in the direction, but they were usually of local interest and were not backed by such enthusiastic organizations as the movement is at the present time.

The Civil Service Reform movement was the most important of the earlier movements. This reform was attracting great attention about the time of Garfield's assassination, July 2nd / 1881. It had been mentioned and discussed by both parties previous to this time, but a civil service measure, that accomplished much, had never been adopted by either of the parties. The bill

which was now under consideration not only applied to National politics, but to State politics as well. The bill has been successful to a certain extent, but from the conditions of politics and the amount of corruption and vice, which attend each election, especially in the large cities, it seems that it is not an entire success at the present day.

At the time when these movements were again taken up, the name politics was a synonym for vice and corruption. It had come to a point of a man's fitness for office, but on account of the bribe he could buy, or the amount of favor he would show individuals if he secured the office.

These vices exist not only at election time, but all through the administrations, although they are not so prominent and the ordinary man will pay no attention to the municipal affairs. He will say that the city officials are able to attend to the business of the city and that he has not time to spend in tending to city affairs. But would it not be

better if he would take time and investigate the matter and see what kind of officials the City was supporting and find out whether or not they were fit to hold offices.

Why is it that men will allow the affairs of the City to be run by a set of politicians, who have no interest at all in the welfare of the City, but are perfectly satisfied as long as they hold their office and get their remuneration no matter in what way it comes or from what source. Many of them are like the detectives who are hired by two opposing parties, the one pays the detective to try and catch the criminal, while the criminal is paying the detective a larger sum, probably, to keep him out of danger.

It seems that the citizens do not realize that every dollar which is spent as a bribe in elections or given to officers, who are supposed to enforce the laws, is just so much loss for them. They do not realize that the City government is a great business organization banded together

for the common good of its members, which includes themselves, and that any act by the officials either good or bad has its proportionate effect on each member.

They go to the polls on election day and vote for men without considering their ability to perform the duties devolving upon them if elected and never thinking of the character of the candidate.

What kind of a government can we have when we elect officers in this way? Men who are expected and whose business it is to preserve the peace of the community and to protect its citizens. Take for example the policeman who, as a rule, comes from a low class of society and is edicted to many of the lower forms of vice. While on duty he never hesitates to go into the saloon and take a social glass or so with the bartender and after he has repeated this process a few times what ability has he to protect the citizens?

Of course we cannot blame the officer

for serving on the force, it is the fault of the people, if they will allow such a state of affairs to exist and be perpetuated and are willing to receive the loss and injury which comes to them from such a government.

The reform was at first regarded by the people as only a local affair and thought it not worth while to think of it. And so during the beginning of the reform the reformers had a very hard time. There were people who were willing to do all they could to advance the morals of the community, but they were not willing to have it known that they were doing any thing of the kind for fear it might cause some enemies for they or, possibly, hurt their trade.

But it proved later not to be a reform started by a few cranks and something that would only last for a short time. Some of the better citizens seeing this, took interest in the work and the reform movement became the principal subject of conversation in all the cities and many organizations were formed, some of the most important are:

The Civic Federation of Chicago, which has at its head Mr Lyman J. Sage and has a membership of one hundred and thirty-four. Its work is carried on chiefly by seven standing committees and in each of the sixteen wards of Chicago one of these federations has been organized and although the federation is young, great good has already been accomplished.

The Municipal League of Boston organized in eighteen ninety two. Its membership at present is limited to two hundred and fifty. It includes members of all secret organizations and representatives from all classes who are in favor of the bettering of municipal affairs.

The municipal league of Philadelphia has a membership of three thousand five hundred and has its organization established in over one third of the wards of the city.

There is also a Woman's Civic Club in Philadelphia. As stated in the articles of confederation, the object of the Club is

"to promote by education and active co-operation, a higher public spirit and better social order."

Civic Center is the name which was adopted by the reform Society of Washington. It is non-sectarian and non-political. Its work is more for the organization of other Societies than for direct work.

There are also organizations of importance in Baltimore, Albany, Detroit and in fact all the large cities of the country.

The numbers of Societies have been constantly increasing and the number of members in the Societies has been increasing so that today the work is an enormous one.

There are no fixed rules for the organizations. Each one framing a set of rules for its own use, but while they vary in many minute particulars, the same general plan is followed by all. And they are all organized and working for the same purpose, that of raising the standard of the people and politics both morally and intellectually.

From these few facts it may be seen that this movement is not one of simply local interest, and one which will soon die away, but it is an effort which will be maintained and one which will accomplish its purpose.

The need of the reform cannot be questioned for many cases can be sighted where political corruption is going on continually and the people are aware of it and yet they do nothing to prevent it.

Take for instance the pardoning of criminals from the State's prison, the power which now rests in the hands of the governor and the State board of pardons. A man who has been duly convicted of murder, in the first degree, by a competent court and has been sentenced to the penitentiary for life or it may be has been sentenced to be hanged. The man goes to prison and about election time, after some of the hard feeling, in the community, toward the murdered is quieted down, some of his friends start out with a petition to the governor to pardon this criminal. It

is easy to get the names of some of the prominent citizens on the petition, either by the thoughtlessness of the individual asked to sign the petition or by a small bribe.

The Governor receives the petition, sees on it the names of some influential politicians and he decides the best thing for him to do is to pardon this man in order that he may have some chance for re-election. The murderer is then free to commit any crime which he wishes.

Again, take as an example of municipal corruption, the condition of the liquor traffic especially in the large cities of the prohibition State of Kansas. In any of the five largest cities in the state, it is almost as easy to secure liquor as it is in any Missouri town.

In the cities where the metropolitan police system exists, they claim that were it not for the joints and gambling dens the city would have no way to pay the force. So they perpetuate crime in order that they may keep a police force, whose duty it is to enforce the laws of the

State as well as those of the City. Then they expect the officers to close these places of revenue which furnish them their salary. And what do the citizens do? They sit back with folded hands and closed mouths and allow this evil to flourish. Only this past week, there was a complaint made in one of the daily papers that, owing to the high fines which had been imposed upon the jointists in Kansas City, Kansas, the city had not received enough money from the jointists to pay police expenses, for the fines had been so high it had driven a large number of the jointists out of business.

These corruption do not only exist at the running of the city government, but they also extend into the educational matters. The men on the school board being politicians work for their own good and try to satisfy the leading politicians instead of acting in a way which will give the best advantages for education to the students. This is a place where politicians should never enter

into the question.

Neither should the instructors in state institutions be appointed on a count of the political party which they may belong to, while it may be all right in many cases for the teachers to be changed when a new party comes in to control, there is surely no doubt in the minds of the people that more harm has been done in this way than in almost any other in hindering the progress of education in these schools.

Some new form should be adopted whereby elections may be held without the large amount of combat and wire pulling that there is going on at each election at the present time. There are many methods which might be used, some of which are now being put forward by the reform societies.

The results of these new methods are becoming more prominent at each election. There seems to be more peace at the polls and not so much drunkenness. This is done partly by the officers which the society have elected to fill positions in the

city. There have been many changes in the election laws in a majority of the cities. A very popular form of election adopted is the Australian Ballot System, whereby it is claimed that an election can be carried on more honestly than by the common form.

It is true these changes have improved the condition of affairs, but have not given so extensive results as was at first looked. But with a better work of officers this system may be very much improved and this is one of the objects of these societies. They nominate a man whom they believe is competent to fill the position, and to not pay any regard to what political party he may belong to. They simply decide that he is a good man, and will try to work for the welfare of the public and not for a few politicians who have the money to bribe him to turn his power in their favor.

A few such men have already been elected and are doing very satisfactory work in many of the cities. In a number of

cases men before being nominated for an office by these societies have had to sign a written contract, saying, that they would perform to the best of their ability all the duties devolved upon them - and that they would try to enforce the laws which were under their control.

The future of these reforms is likely to be very successful for the reforms are coming more into favor with the public as a whole than was at first expected.

The plans of these leagues and societies being adopted on the large scale by the citizens of our great cities, will mean a thorough purification of politics all over the country. The city and state governments will not have the fraud connected with them which now exists, but there will be men elected to these offices whom money cannot buy.

Not only will this be true in regard to the city offices, but the school board will be a non-political body and the teachers will not be turned out of employment on account of their belonging to the Catholic church or belonging to some

other political party than the party in office, but they will be turned off on account of their inability to teach. This will make a great improvement in the instruction in the schools both city and state.

Great care will be taken to place men on the police force who will not spend half their time at the bar, but many who will enforce the law to the very letter.

Whenever these conditions prevail, it will be very easy to carry on the elections without the fraud and riots which usually attend the elections of today and all future generations will praise the societies of today for the great work which they accomplished in purifying the politics and raising the moral and the intellectual advantages of the people.

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