

Limitations of Commission Government.

1. The form is not conducive to harmony in the governing body. As each Commissioner represents a department, and the five make up an executive body for the whole, Commissioners quite frequently resent interference by other Commissioners with their respective departments. There is the tendency to divide the city into five little governments.
2. Election is a poor method of obtaining trained and competent officials. The tendency is to elect men who are experts in getting elected and not specialists in administration.
3. It provides nothing more than an incentive to better service. It gives the officials no new technique and no new method. With some noticeable exceptions, cities show little administrative progress under it.
4. It practically abolishes the office of Mayor, and does not provide an apex for the pyramid of local administration. It does not go to the logical conclusion in concentrating responsibility.
5. A Commissioner may just be in process of becoming efficient as an administrative head when he fails of re-election. This unnecessarily shortens the tenure of office of heads of departments, who should be permanent as long as good service is given.
6. Department heads cannot give all their attention to their departments, but must invest considerable time and energy on "mending their fences" for re-election.
7. Department heads are apt to make appointments coming under their jurisdiction with a view to a possible influence on their own chances of re-election.

NOTES

It should be noted that few of the cities operating under the Commission Form of Government have over 150,000 population.

Since Canadian municipalities have never made a practice of electing officials, other than Mayors and members of Council, a great many of the benefits to be derived by American municipalities under this plan already exist in our methods of government.

About the year 1913 the Commission-Manager Plan of Government developed. This type endeavored to overcome many of the limitations of Commission Government and many of the cities working under the latter amended their charters in order to conform with the new plan.

Commission - Manager Government will be the subject of the next bulletin in this series.

LECTIVE CITIZEN CO-OPERATION

WHAT IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS SHOULD
BE EACH BODY'S BUSINESS

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Forms of City Government—Story No. 1

COMMISSION GOVERNMENT

"No matter what form of government a city may have, if the people themselves are not interested in it and do not participate in it, that government will never be a success."—City Manager, Dayton.

This series of bulletins on Forms of City Government in vogue, at present, in Canada and United States is published in response to the requests of various citizens.

In this connection it is also interesting to note that the Ontario Municipal Association, at its Convention held in Toronto, August, 1919, passed a resolution which, in brief, recommended to the Provincial authorities that they amend the Municipal Act in order to provide for an optional system of Municipal Government along the line of Commission Government, Commission-Manager Government, or such system as investigation will show to best conform to Ontario ideals of municipal government and satisfy modern needs.

The Bureau does not hold a brief for any of the forms to be described, but some of the strong and weak points of each are pointed out to assist citizens in forming their judgments.

The History and Growth of Commission Government.

Galveston, Texas, is credited with having introduced the Commission Form of Government.* The then existing government was unequal to overcoming the difficulties which faced that city after the disaster in 1900, and a group of citizens designed a type of government with which they hoped, at least temporarily, to meet the local needs. It proved so successful in its operation that, with slight modifications, it was adopted permanently and became known as "Commission Government."

Previous to this time, although the form of municipal government prevalent in the United States—under which the citizens elected not only a Mayor and Council but often heads of departments and minor officials—had proven itself ill-adapted to serve the needs of the community, no radical changes had been made. Such

*It should be noted that Washington, D.C., has been governed by an appointive Commission since 1878. Several other American cities were also governed temporarily in such manner previous to 1900.

widespread attention did the government of Galveston attract, however, that, at the end of 1918, more than 600 cities had adopted Commission Government.

What Commission Government Is.

It is government of the municipality by a small body of men, usually called a Commission, in whom are vested all the powers of the municipality, executive and legislative. The Commission acts collectively in a legislative capacity, and individually in an executive capacity.

- (a) The Commission, as a rule, consists of the Mayor and four Commissioners, all of whom are elected at large for a period of from two to five years, two years being the most common.
- (b) The Mayor, in most cases, has no special powers as Mayor. He acts as Chairman of the Commission, is the official head of the city, and usually has charge of the most important department.
- (c) The activities of the city government are divided to suit local requirements, each department being presided over by a Commissioner. A usual division is:

Department of

Public Affairs. Mayor
Public Safety. Commissioner
Public Improvements. Commissioner
Parks and Public Property. Commissioner
Accounts and Finance. Commissioner

- (d) The electors do not, as a rule, choose the Commissioners with reference to the Department which they are to direct. This is generally decided after election, either
 - a—By majority vote of the Commission, or
 - b—By appointment of the Mayor.
- (e) The Board of Education and the whole existing school organization remain unchanged under Commission Government.

Initiative, Referendum and Recall.

In almost all cases where Commission Government has been adopted, the people—under the impression that they were parting with powers formerly possessed—inserted in their government the Initiative, Referendum and Recall. These provide for citizen participation in the Government at any time, upon petition of a percentage* of the voters:

Initiative: A percentage of the voters may ask the Commissioners to pass an Act. The latter must then either pass such Act, or submit it to a general or special election of the citizens.

Referendum: On demand of a percentage of voters, the Commission are compelled to put to a vote of the people a law they have passed, before the same can be enforced.

Recall: A percentage of the voters may compel the electors to vote on whether or not a member of the Commission shall be recalled.

Advantages of Commission Government.

1. It simplifies the structure of City Government, leads to better financial control, and enables the city to conduct its business more promptly.
2. By placing each Commissioner in charge of a definite department and making him responsible to the people for its proper and intelligent management, it gives conspicuous responsibility and hence accountability of all elected officials to the people.
3. The Initiative, Referendum and Recall permit actual citizen participation in civic affairs.
4. It stimulates, for a time at least, citizen interest in civic government.

*The "percentage" varies, although the most common is 25% of number of voters who voted at the previous election.