DEVELOPING NEW IDEAS FOR A COMMISSION GOVERNMENT

Suggestions Are Made by W. A. Bryan in Address.

Interested Audience Is Given Pointers by Speaker.

PROF. W. A. BRYAN.

Who read a scholarly paper on commission government before the Church Club last evening.

Before a large and interested audience in the Davies memorial building last evening, composed of members of the Church Club and their friends, Prof. W. A. Bryan, of the College of Hawaii and a member of the special charter committee of the civic federation, read an exceedingly scholarly paper upon the commission form of government, dwelling especially upon a form which he believes would be adaptable for Honolulu. In this paper he proposes two or three new ideas, which have never been tried, but which he believes are improvements over old methods. His address in part is as follows:

"'This is the city and I am one of its citizens; whatever interests the rest, interests me,' said Walt Whitman, the good grey poet of democracy, and it is in that spirit and for similar reasons that I have undertaken to speak briefly on the very pertinent question of the commission form of government for our city.

"With the past President, the present President and the future President of the United States, representing as they do three distinct phases of national partisanism, all on record as unreservedly favoring this new municipal system; with so much in the daily press and magazines reporting the practical workings of the system in more than two hundred towns and cities in America; with such careful and scholarly addresses on the subject as those by our distinguished Governor and the able chief justice of the supreme court recently delivered before select audiences, and later published to the community, it is foreign to my main purpose to attempt an extended argument for the adoption of the short ballot or commission form of government for the city of Honolulu.

"The plan of the elective commission, or short ballot system of city government, in its essential features is simple government simplified to the final degree. Five features are found in all commission laws and for the sake of clearness may be here stated:

The Five Features.

"The first feature, and the fundamental one of all, is that the legislative and the administrative authority in the city are exercised by one and the same body.

"Then, second, each member of this body—which may be called at pleasure the commission or council or supervisors—is placed in charge of a division of the work of the city.

"Third; the board is small, never having more than ten and usually, and preferably, not more than five.

"Fourth; all of these members are elected by the voters of the entire city and never by wards or districts.

"Finally, fifth, in addition to ordinary methods of publicity one or more methods of popular and direct control are included, such as the referendum, which, under certain rules, enables the voters to compel their commissioners to reconsider, or repeal, or submit ordinances objected to, to the vote of the people; the initiative, which enables the people to originate, present, and if necessary, pass ordinances; and lastly the recall, which enables the people when the majority so wills, to remove unworthy members from the commission.

"These then are the five main articles of faith at the heart of the commission, or short ballot plan, and the three devices resorted to, to insure popular control, devices which are in the last analysis political socialism.

"In developing this simple plan to meet the variety of conditions existing in different communities and in order to graft onto it new and progressive ideas of government it is but natural that there should be a wide variety of detail. Each charter granted is an attempt to improve on those elsewhere in force, until the flexibility of the main plan has been fully proven and a number of plans have been put into successful operation.

"With all the ingenuity of citizens, statesmen and progressive politicians brought to bear on the improvement of so good and simple a plan we doubtless now stand near the zenith of the perfection of this modern, direct, just and business-like scheme of municipal administration, especially as applied to the smaller cities in the class to which Honolulu belongs.

The Short Ballot Charter.

"With the pros and the cons before us then, are you in favor of a short ballot charter for Honolulu? I am, and believe that if an intelligible, carefully drawn bill is prepared and presented to the legislature by a group of representative citizens, selected from all walks in life, that the bill will be passed and that it will be signed by whoever occupies the Governor's chair. Moreover, if it is referred to the people of the city for ratification they will give it their indorsement in no uncertain terms, and will at the same time rebuke any public official or political faction that attempts seriously to block such a measure.

"Having been asked as an individual and a citizen to submit a brief outline of the structure of a new charter for Honolulu, I venture the following in the most tentative way, purely as a basis for consideration and discussion.

"In its ground plan the new charter should follow in its main outlines those adopted in scores of cities on the mainland. As to the legislative act it might well be called an act to grant a new charter to the City and County of Honolulu—of the short ballot type and repealing all laws or parts of laws in conflict therewith—for an attempt to amend the existing law by the patch method is a waste of effort.

"As to the commission organization itself, I would suggest, if possible, that it be called the council of the city and county of Honolulu and its members commissioners, in order to avoid confusion here and elsewhere as to the titles, acts and powers of the existing board of supervisors. Then, too, a commission government for Honolulu would be understood everywhere and would be an advertising asset.

Form of Commission.

"The council should be composed of five members (including the mayor) all to be elected for four years. To establish continuity in the council two commissioners should be elected biennially and the commissioner designated as mayor by the council, by reason of that fact, should be required to stand for indorsement by re-election, as commissioner, by the people after his second year in office. Thus every two years the voters would elect or return two new commissioners and reelect or recall the mayor-commissioner then in office, or else elect three new commissioners. This plan in practise would admit of a continuation and indorsement or an alteration in the city policy by the result of the regular biennial election without the intervention of general partisanism.

"After six months in office all elective officers should be subject to a recall initiated by a petition stating the reason for the demand and signed by at least twenty-five per cent of the citizens voting at the last preceding election.

"The council should be given all of the powers now enjoyed by the board of supervisors and the charter should be drawn so as to make it possible to take over additional powers from time to time and insofar as the legislature at this time, or in the future, may be induced to transfer them to the city to the end that Honolulu may become, what it should be, a normal city with jurisdiction over its sewer system, school and public buildings and equipment, its water works, jails, streets and all similar matters as well as provided with reasonable taxing and bond voting powers.

"The limits of the city should be the limits of the island since the interests of the whole island are closely knit together with the city proper. Provision should be made, however, to admit of the formation of burroughs with some degree of local government at a later time.

"The salary of the commissioners should be $3000 per annum, but each commissioner on election should be allowed discretion, by which if he chooses, but with the consent of his associates, he may divide his salary, retaining not more than $600 for himself as head of his department, paying at least $2400 to an administrative assistant to be appointed by him with the consent and approval of, and subject to dismissal from the council.

For a City Manager.

"The council should also have power after election by a four-fifths vote (but not until sufficient opportunity has been given for referendum proceedings if there should develop popular disapproval) to appoint a city manager who, under the council as a body, would be the admistrative head of the city—enforcing territorial and municipal laws — transmitting to the department heads written notice of acts of the council, designating the duties and office to perform and carry out the various ordinances of the council, and to be responsible to the council for the prompt and business-like execution of all functions of the city government.

His salary should be not less than four or five thousand dollars per annum and should be paid month by month from a fund made up pro rata and deducted from the salaries of the commissioners. The mayor as the head of the council would be the ceremonial head of the city; the manager, the general business agent of the council.

"The department of public affairs might include such divisions as civil service, law, city clerk, and publicity. The department of finance and accounts would have to do with the work of the treasurer, department auditors and assessors. The department of public safety would include the police, fire, health and relief divisions. The public works department would include the engineering, survey, water, street, garbage, sewer and lighting interests. The department of parks and buildings would care for the parks, markets, public buildings, and so on.

Elect Department Heads.

"By this plan any capable citizen would be eligible to appointive office in the council to serve as the head of one of these departments, and, if qualified, might be chosen by a citizen commission or elected.

"The mayor should be appointed by the council to serve as the head of the city government and should preside there. But as mayor he would be required to stand for popular approval and reelection to the council every two years. As an expression of the voters' preference a choice for mayor might be indicated on the ballot after the name of one of the commissioners. The result of such preference voting would in no way bind the council in the selection from its members of the mayor after their election. The mayor should have a vote on all questions in council, but no veto power.

"In the beginning, at least, the auditor should be appointed by the Governor of the Territory from outside the council or the city's employees, preferably from the audit department of the Territory as representing the Territory. The books and accounts of the city should be gone over by such an official thoroughly at least twice each year. At some later date the auditor and accountant expert could be added to the list of elective city officers as a separate office.

"Provision should be made in the charter which would authorize the council to establish an honorary civil service commission to be put on a working basis, say five years after the acceptance of the charter. In the meantime, their preliminary work would be to prepare the way for that step by encouraging our public and private schools to fit pupils to enter the municipal service.

Manner of Voting.

"As to the main provisions for the election, the names of the candidates should be placed on the ballot on petition stating the position for which the person is a candidate, signed separately by twenty-five voters. The elections should be absolutely non-partisan, insofar as Territorial or national parties are concerned, and should be held in 'off years' if possible.

"The ballot with all the names of the candidates for the offices to be filled should be so arranged as to admit of a system of preferential voting for first, second and third choice for each office, thus uniting the primary with the election, at each election, in a way to secure an accurate and complete expression of the will of the people at the polls with a minimum of cost and effort.

"By this plan a majority of all votes cast is necessary to an election. If no majority is found in the first choice the man with the lowest first choice votes is dropped and first and second choices are added together. This process is continued, the lowest man being dropped each time, until all preferences have been united and all candidates elected to office by a clear majority of all the voters as first, second or third choice. By this plan an officer always goes into power with a majority of the people behind him, and it may be added, as an aside, that it admits in certain cases of the election of the more efficient rather than the most popular candidate, for people often vote first for the man they like and as a second choice for the best man.

Special Features.

"As to the initiative and referendum, I would favor requiring a twenty-five percentum petition of the voters at the last regular election to place the question before the people in a special or a general election, in order to prevent ill-considered proposals coming to a vote.

"A petition of twenty-five percentum of the voters at any time six months after the inauguration of officers, in order to make the recall petition effective, would seem to be a conservative arrangement.

"Franchises should in every case be referred back to the people at special or, in any case, at the next succeeding election or on petition for a referendum.

"As to special features—just one word and I am done. In addition to the plan of endorsing the selection of mayor, and thereby the policy of the council which, so far as I know, is now proposed for the first time, and the plan of permitting the head of a department the privilege, with the approval of the council, to divide his salary with one competent assistant, which, I believe, is also new; and a plan whereby, if desirable, the council after election can, by a four-fifths majority, elect a city manager to be the business head of the city government—an adaptation of the Staunton-Lockport idea, I wish to urge the consideration of placing some plan of 'group participation' in the draft of the charter which will admit of various civic, charitable and business organizations entering, under certain regulations, into a definite participating and advisory relation with the city—as recently proposed by Mr. G. H. Murdock.

"I also wish to urge for consideration an entirely new idea, namely, that a plan of optional taxation for specific purposes, the proceeds to be voted in public town meeting by the people paying the tax, be considered in the charter as a means of keeping the city not only an efficiently governed city, but one in which an open school is maintained for the encouragement of the proper interest and pride in the city and its affairs, and the development of the citizen as well as the city."

THE CURTEST EVER.

It appears that Governor Johnson of California did not find anything to be thankful for this year, says the Salt Lake Tribune. His Thanksgiving proclamation was phrased with a barren officialdom style which is almost insulting to the idea of Thanksgiving, and shameful to the Governor of a great State. That proclamation is the shortest ever, the driest, the most poverty stricken in idea and the most hypocritical in expression. Here it is:

"In accordance with custom and the proclamation of the President of the United States, I do hereby designate Thursday, the 28th day of November, 1912, as Thanksgiving day."

That is probably the shortest Thanksgiving proclamation ever issued, and it is likely that California will be ashamed of it ages after Johnson is dead and gone.

A DEAL ON THE SIDE.

"Why is your hired man working so industriously all of a sudden?"

"I think he has a deal on with a moving picture concern which wants a few films of life on the farm."—Kansas City Journal.

"HOMESTEAD" KELSEY TAKES HIS PEN IN HAND ONCE MORE

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