

The Youth Training Courses for Young Women are a nationally co-ordinated effort which can only succeed if national co-ordinated support is forthcoming. The Dominion and Provincial Governments are doing their part. But can they be expected to continue to do so unless local people understand, appreciate, and are willing, if necessary, to sacrifice in order to continue and extend this dynamic type of practical education for Youth?

What other investment could possibly yield such high dividends at so small a cost? What is the use of talking about Democracy unless each one of us is willing to give up some of our leisure in an effort to make Democracy work? "The time has come," as an eminent educator points out, "when we must not only be willing to fight for Democracy, but to be bothered by it every day."

Twenty-Five Years of the City Manager Plan

By LEE S. GREENE

A QUARTER-CENTURY has passed since the history of the city manager plan in the United States was inaugurated. An appraisal of the successes and failures of the plan has disclosed the extent of its spread and the characteristic features of its operation.¹ The city manager plan is a product partly of growth and partly of invention. Its forerunner was the commission plan which abandoned the traditional separation of powers principle of city government as well as the partisan ballot. The city manager plan was evolved in Staunton, Virginia, in 1908 as a projected solution of local problems. The scheme there developed, involving the employment of a municipal business manager under the orders of the municipal legislative body, was seized upon by Richard S. Childs as a means of furthering his objective of establishing

the principle of the short ballot, that is, the principle of limiting to a small number the group of municipal officers to be chosen by popular vote. In 1912 the outlines of the plan envisaged by Childs were adopted in Sumter, South Carolina. At about the same time something of the same type of scheme developed in Fredericksburg, Virginia. When Dayton, Ohio, began operation under this form of administration in 1914, the plan was definitely launched upon the course since followed.

On January 1, 1940, 472 cities in the United States operated under the city manager plan. Of this number 48 have been made the subject of special study for the Social Science Research Council reports and constitute the principal basis for comments made in this article. Although the circumstances under which the plan was adopted differed widely from place to place, adopting cities may be divided into three general types prior to adoption; namely, those which were machine-ridden², those which were faction-ridden³, and those which were community-governed.⁴ At the time of

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(1) This article is based very largely on three books published in 1940 by Public Administration Service, Chicago, summarizing studies made under auspices of the Social Science Research Council. These books are: Harold A. Stone, Don K. Price, and Kathryn H. Stone, *City Manager Government in the United States*; same authors, *City Manager Government in Nine Cities*; and *City Manager Government in Seven Cities* by Mosher, Harris, White, Vieg, Bolling, Miller, Monroe, and Wilson. The cost of the whole set is \$8.50.

(2) Including among others Dayton, Ohio; Flint, Michigan; Kansas City, Missouri; Rochester, New York; and Toledo, Ohio.

(3) As, for example, Austin, Texas; Hamilton, Ohio; and San Diego, California.

(4) Small cities, for the most part. Ames, Iowa, is an important example.

its adoption in machine-ridden cities the city manager scheme was supported by commercial interests and reform organizations who saw in the scheme a means of ridding the city of corrupt politicians and establishing in their places a business administrator under the general guidance of the municipal legislature. In faction-ridden cities, contrary to those which were machine-ridden, no one political group was able to maintain power or to exercise even the degree of coordination which characterized machine administration. The friction and inefficiency thus resulting from consistent lack of leadership was the occasion for the city manager movement in these cities, rather than commercial and reformist distaste for boss politics. In the community-governed cities the political game was not of primary importance. Social, racial, and religious differences and the attendant political strife so characteristic of other municipalities were largely non-existent. In these communities the city manager scheme was adopted in order to improve the quality of public management.

The interest which business groups usually felt in the campaigns which established the city manager plan was as a rule expressed through the organization of political pressure groups to put across the plan. In some communities the business group was also identified with reform movements unrelated to the question of governmental forms.¹ On occasion the campaign for the adoption of the manager plan was associated with an aggressive spirit of growth and expansion on the part of business leaders in the community.² The advocacy of the city manager plan by business interests led typically to opposition from organized labor in those communities where unions existed. Labor identified the city manager plan with the dictatorship of business leaders, but there is some indication that this attitude has changed.

Repeatedly the business leaders and their associates after having secured the

adoption of the plan aided in launching it by presenting or backing slates of candidates for the first city manager council. In some communities this group was able to hold together for a considerable period of time, but as a rule the initial influence of the business leaders was not maintained. In some cases the decline of the authority of these interests was caused by the refusal of the leaders to continue giving time to municipal affairs. Sometimes opposing groups were able to convince the voters that they did not wish business domination. In some instances the business leaders themselves refused to accept the impartial city management or the resulting strict law enforcement which they had called into being.³ The withdrawal of leadership by business men did not as a rule spell the end of the manager plan. Other groups came to adopt the scheme even though changes were often made in the relationships of the manager to the council. In some cities managers became identified with political factions, but the plan itself endured.⁴

The record of the city manager plan in the field of management is a good one. Outstanding accomplishments have been recorded in the field of financial administration, even though in many instances managers were not given full control over the city's financial machinery. City managers uniformly secured the adoption of a city budget scheme and often followed this by programs of budgetary control which involved the improvement of allotment plans, the formalization of work programs, the control of purchases in accordance with available funds, and the installation of modern, understandable, and usable systems of accounts. As a general rule, an increase in centralized purchasing followed the appointment of the first city manager. In a few cities salvaging has been developed.

Improvement in personnel practices also resulted from the activities of the

(3) The story of Dallas business men and the Texas Centennial is especially interesting on this score: cf. Stone, Price, and Stone, *Nine Cities*, op. cit., pp. 310-325.

(4) Kansas City was the outstanding example until the recent overthrow of the Pendergast machine.

(1) As in Jackson, Michigan, where the wet-dry issue was a feature of the campaign.

(2) Dallas furnishes a good example;

manager, but often without any considerable degree of formalization of procedure. In over one-fourth of the cities surveyed, civil service commissions had been set up by law independent of the manager. No generalizations can be developed from the resulting experience with these commissions. Some of them aided and supported the managers¹; in other cities the independent commissions were obstacles to coordinated administration.

The elimination of the spoils system from city management is an accomplishment in some communities of the city manager form and its operation, although in some instances the use of the spoils system had not existed prior to the advent of the manager plan. In any case, the spoils technique was not a characteristic feature of city manager cities. True, in a few cases the spoils system continued to flourish in the city manager operation, in at least some segments of the city service.² For the most part, managers acted wisely in retaining employees hired before the advent of the city manager plan wherever such employees could be used.

City manager cities have a good record in the encouragement given to training. Many managers have actively aided and encouraged training, using local educational institutions as well as the facilities furnished by the International City Managers' Association. A number of managers experimented successfully with the employment of apprentices in city management. Managers themselves reacted in different ways towards the career aspects of their own positions. Some managers believed in moving from one location to another as improved opportunities presented themselves, whereas others emphasized the importance of a continuous career in a single community. The membership of the International City Managers' Association is testimony to the professional view of the job taken by the average city manager.

The establishment of the manager plan, resulting as it generally did in increased stability for employees, enhanced morale and a feeling for the idea of a career in public employment. In some cases cities began to experiment with formal promotion methods, but for the most part promotion was by the personal judgment of the administrator, tempered by seniority considerations. This practice, although not completely satisfactory, does not differ greatly from practice in many important personnel jurisdictions.³

The general lack of adequate retirement plans constituted a grave problem for the city manager cities. This question, equally serious for municipalities over the whole country, cannot be adequately solved until the states themselves furnish leadership in the establishment of state-wide systems.⁴

Most city managers accepted city employees unions tolerantly, even if somewhat reluctantly in individual instances. In some cases employees were forbidden to join unions.⁵ There is some evidence that understanding between administrators and affiliated unions increased as they engaged in mutual attacks on the cities' problems. Although it is not implied in the studies, there is reason to believe that the future expansion of municipal functions will require the development of acceptable relations with employee unions. Some revision of old stereotypes is apparently required.

The managers studied have, in general, been able to bring about significant improvement in organization structure and in the coordination of municipal activities, even though they were not always given a free hand. The result generally included smoother functioning of city departments, the centering of significant information in the manager's office without unduly burdening him

(1) As in San Diego, Long Beach, and Dallas.

(2) Kansas City, until recently, was an example of a thorough-going spoils system, but fortunately not a typical example.

(3) See, for example, Lee S. Greene, "Personnel Administration in the Tennessee Valley Authority," *The Journal of Politics*, May, 1939, pp. 177-179.

(4) For advances in this direction, cf. the *Municipal Year Book*, 1940 (Chicago, 1940), p. 99.

(5) Winnetka, Illinois, furnishes an example of this policy.

with details, and the careful planning of city work. In many cases the inception of the city-manager plan was associated with the beginning or expansion of a local public works program. A common pattern involved the close association of the manager scheme with a beginning of city planning, both physical and economic. In no instance, however, did the results of physical planning leave room for complacency.¹

The permanence of the city manager plan seems to rest upon the development of a relationship between the city council and the city manager which will permit the central coordination of the city's business without diminishing the political ties which necessarily exist between the council member and the citizen. Attempts have been made to establish an appropriate relationship by legal prescription, but the evidence indicates that the problem must be worked out in each individual instance by the manager and his council. This should not be taken to indicate that no guiding standards exist. The relationships between first managers and their councils were often influenced by the desire of business men on the council to be freed from consideration of the details of administration. In addition, many such councils relied upon their managers to furnish public leadership for the support of the manager plan and the manager's specific policies. Thus the manager was thrown into the political arena or into active civic leadership contrary to the notions of some supporters of the manager form. Although this relationship of the manager to the public often continued in many cities, the councilmen came in time to reassert political leadership, whereas the manager began to consider himself the servant of the council. The managers have often protected their positions with the councils by the avoidance of sponsorship of any program not previously approved by councilmen. Frequently the establishment and maintenance of this accord between the manager and his

council involved the use of executive sessions of the council, with the result that public meetings of the council developed into dull sessions with a poor record of public attendance.

Experience of managers with respect to political leadership varied in relation to the type of city involved. In machine-ridden cities the manager plan was actively identified with political issues; the reaction to it was strong and persistent. Thus the manager became for a time a political leader, but later managers adopted a more retiring attitude. In the faction-ridden cities the political reaction to the manager plan was less violent. Although managers became and remained civic leaders to a considerable degree,² they did not become political symbols as they did in machine-ridden municipalities. Because these managers were civic leaders rather than political symbols, later councils did not develop complete domination over them. In the community-governed cities the manager did not become a political symbol nor was he a civic leader as a rule. The relationships which eventually came to exist between the council and the manager in these localities were conditioned by the view the councils came to adopt that administrative details should rest largely in the managers' hands.

The city manager plan has had a history of successful operation in the main. The period of its most rapid adoption was between 1918 and 1923, since which time the spread of the plan has been at a progressively lower rate. Whether or not events will provide another spurt in the rate of adoption cannot be foretold. For those manager cities which exist or which may be established certain unsolved problems still remain.

The ideal of complete integration of municipal functions under the manager has not been fully realized. The threat to this integration in the form of special boards for newly acquired functions of a proprietary character is of some signif-

(1) The city manager system cannot be expected to solve problems beyond the city's control. Physical planning is increasingly in this category.

(2) To a high degree in some instances, notably in Janesville, Wisconsin.

icance. An expansion of municipal ownership of public utilities, for example, is apt to bring a demand for separate administration of such utilities.¹ The situation may be further complicated by the probability that some municipal proprietary agencies will further extend their services beyond city boundaries, thus giving rise to increased pressure for the formation of special districts. Increased public appreciation for the importance of administrative integration is demanded.

Additional clarification and improvement of the administrative structure of city financial agencies is needed in many quarters. Managers are often handicapped in this respect because of badly drawn charters based on faulty understanding of the check-and-balance scheme. Accounting functions are confused with those of auditing.

Certainly some opportunity remains for improvement of municipal personnel administration in city manager cities. In some fields, a lead from state agencies is definitely required. In addition, the record of personnel management in the cities studied appears to indicate that improvement might come through greater cooperation between cities and by a wider exchange of trained personnel between cities. Formalized personnel methods in the smaller cities would scarcely be useful unless a plan of interchange of personnel between cities were worked out. In larger communities increased formalization of personnel methods might be advisable, especially as informal methods, however good, are vulnerable to public attack. Increased formalization of personnel techniques will, of course, meet considerable opposition from administrators themselves.

In many instances there is evidence that councils concern themselves too frequently with minute administrative

details. Experience indicates, however, that legal restrictions applied to this relationship are apt to be mischievous rather than useful. Councilmen have sought to short-circuit managers in some instances, but in general managers appear to have succeeded in getting themselves recognized as the appropriate channel of communication between the city servant and the council.

Although improved coordination of municipal activities has taken place, the survey indicates that much room remains for improvement. Old habits of duplicating activities and old attitudes of departmental independence still remain. Tendencies of this character are so persistent in administrative organizations that constant attention is required not only to eliminate them but to prevent their recurrence.

Improvement in the technique of public reporting appears to be called for in some areas. City manager cities appear to be weaker in this regard than might be supposed from the advances made in other areas of work. Relationship between managers and the press seem to be good, on the whole, but on the other hand, a considerable proportion of the cities appear to lack a well-rounded total program of interesting the citizen in the services of his local governmental agencies and informing him of their activities.

In spite of some recorded failures and the recurrence of troublesome problems, the manager plan appears to have justified, in the main, the hopes of its proponents. Those who hoped that it might eliminate politics from city life were guilty of proceeding from false premises, but to those who anticipated that the manager plan might bring about genuine betterment in the administration of that vital business which comprises so much of our civic life the record of twenty-five years must have given intense satisfaction.

(1) See for example, Greene and Abbott, "Tennessee Cities a Proving Ground for Nation," *National Municipal Review*, October, 1940, pp. 670, 671.