

**BULLETIN OF THE UNIVERSITY OF
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VOL. I, NO. 4, PP. 163- 309. CITY
GOVERNMENT BY COMMISSION**

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NO. 428

UNIVERSITY EXTENSION SERIES, VOL. 1, NO. 4, PP. 149-242

CITY GOVERNMENT BY COMMISSION

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CITY GOVERNMENT BY COMMISSION

INTRODUCTION

"Governmental power should be concentrated in the hands of a very few men, who would be so conspicuous that no citizen could help knowing all about them, and the elections should not come frequently."
—Theodore Roosevelt

The object of this bulletin is to meet the already enormous and growing demand upon the University for information on the subject of commission government. It makes no pretense at an exhaustive treatment of the subject—such a treatise being now in preparation by the author for later publication—but aims to give in concise form, such as may be mailed in answer to requests for such information, a comprehensive outline of the plan, its origin, development, and success in various cities, and its advantages and disadvantages as a scheme of municipal organization. Much has been written upon the subject, but not in such form as to be readily accessible to the general public, or of a nature to be readily accepted without considerable verification. The rapid increase in the number of cities that have adopted the plan, and the growing interest in it throughout the entire country, has made a short and reliable presentation of the subject greatly desirable at this time.

Inquiries on the subject, coming to the University not only from cities of Wisconsin, but from all parts of the United States, have been largely from three sources, and, in the preparation of this bulletin, the needs of these three sources have been constantly borne in mind:

First: From college and high school debating societies studying the subject for purposes of joint debate.

Second: From teachers and students of political science preparing courses on municipal government, or theses on this particular field of local administration.

Third: From public officials, legislators, and citizens, investigating the subject with a view to drafting charter laws or adapting them to local conditions, or considering the advisability of adopting such laws for the administration of their local city government.

Up to the present time the University has been unable to meet this demand satisfactorily, owing to the absence of any monograph or comprehensive treatise upon the subject, to its inability to secure sufficient duplicate material of an official or semi-official character, and to the unavailability for mailing purposes of such material as it has been able to secure. It is hoped that this bulletin may meet this demand and thereby perform a very great public service.

In the preparation of this bulletin, an effort has been made to satisfy the requirements of the various sources from which these inquiries have come. A careful analysis of the principles of commission government has been made, as well as an attempt to distinguish between those cities which have adopted it in its entirety, and those which have made but adaptations of various features of it. So far as the author is aware, no previous attempt has been made to clearly define just what commission government, so-called, is. At first this was not necessary; commission government meant a type of organization like that of Galveston. But with the increase in the number of cities operating under the plan, and the increase in the number of variations and departures from the Galveston plan in various cities which claim to have adopted commission government, it has become necessary to determine what we are, and what we are not, to understand by the use of the term, if we are to have a fair and intelligent test of the system in this country. The essential and non-essential features have been given, as well as some of the most notable departures from the true commission government principles as here laid down.

For the convenience of debaters the advantages and disadvantages of the plan have been given separately.

For the convenience of legislators, city and other public officials, and others interested in particular features or provisions of the plan, a comparative analysis has been prepared

giving the provisions of the various charters and laws on each of the important features of the commission plan, as well as on some other features sometimes included. Such an analysis has not heretofore been made, and it is believed that this will be of great value, especially to the citizens of cities contemplating the adoption of the commission plan, and to legislators enacting or amending commission charters or general commission government laws. It is believed that it will be of greater value even than a complete compilation of such charters and laws, for which many requests have been received, since the amount of work entailed in digesting and comparing the provisions of so many public documents once collected is enormous. Many provisions in all charters are very much the same, and great care must be used or important variations may be overlooked.

The results of the plan in the various cities in which it has been tried have been gone into only in the few cities in which it has been in operation over two years, and from which official reports have been secured. This part of the treatment must, consequently, of necessity be brief. Another five years must pass before much of an authoritative nature may be said with regard to the permanent financial capabilities of the various types of organization, and it is to be hoped that at the end of that time, the various commission cities will offer us more comprehensive and intelligent reports than have most cities hitherto under the old type of organization.

The time has passed when a complete list of commission governed cities is of much value. A sufficient number of cities are now operating under the plan, and various modifications of it, to give an adequate test of the system as a working scheme of municipal government within the next few years. In order, however, to give an idea of the extent to which the movement has spread, in what sections of the country it has been most readily accepted, and of the size and character of the cities which have adopted it, a fairly complete list of the cities which have adopted it, or slight modifications of it, has been appended.

A bibliography of periodical and other literature upon the subject has also been included.

The preparation of this bulletin has been made possible through the collection of material made by the Municipal Reference Bureau of the University Extension Division, by which probably the greatest number of requests for information on this subject have been received. This bureau has on file copies of all the charters covered in this bulletin, and some, which on account of their great departures from the principles of commission government here laid down, it has been thought best to omit. The bureau also has a large collection of annual reports, semi-official and periodical literature, and newspaper clippings upon the subject, which have been freely drawn upon in the preparation of this bulletin.

The work of this bureau, and the conditions leading up to its establishment are fully set forth in a special bulletin on the 'Municipal Reference Bureau' issued by the Extension Division of the University. The bureau is in charge of a specialist in municipal administration, and is in cooperation with the various departments of the University and the various state departments at the Capitol. It collects data and information on all the varied subjects of municipal activity and municipal government for the purpose of rendering that material accessible to the cities and citizens of the state. It is able, through the assistance of members of the University faculty and the various state commissions, to give to the municipalities of the state the advice and assistance of experts in practically every branch of municipal administration and the problems of cities. Its aid and assistance is free within the state and, through exchange courtesy, to a limited extent outside the state.

Only through the establishment of such information bureaus, are bulletins of this kind made possible, or indeed, can a proper solution of our municipal problems be looked for. With the enormous concentration of population in our cities and the enormous expenditures of money which it involves, innumerable problems have arisen. As cities have become crowded, questions of housing and sanitation have arisen. As traffic and business interests have grown, problems of paving, dust prevention, and smoke abatement have appeared—prob-