

**A MUNICIPAL PROGRAM: REPORT OF A
COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONAL
MUNICIPAL LEAGUE,
ADOPTED BY THE LEAGUE, NOVEMBER
17, 1899, TOGETHER WITH
EXPLANATORY AND OTHER PAPERS**

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A Municipal Program: Report of a Committee of the National Municipal League, Adopted by the League, November 17, 1899, Together with Explanatory and Other Papers by Various

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PREFATORY NOTE

The Municipal Program adopted by a unanimous vote at the Columbus meeting of the National Municipal League in November, 1899, represents the logical outcome of six years of effort. At the time of the Philadelphia Conference for Good City Government, called in January, 1894, at the joint invitation of the City Club of New York and the Municipal League of Philadelphia, the feeling on the part of students of municipal government and those interested in its reform was largely one of hopelessness. The papers read at the Philadelphia meeting set forth a condition of affairs sufficient to fill the most stout-hearted with a feeling of dismay. Nevertheless, the thought was present to the minds of many that a careful study of municipal conditions and a frequent exchange of views would not only clear the atmosphere, but might eventually lead to the adoption of a plan of action upon which union for concrete work might be possible. Several of the speeches looked toward this end. Indeed, it was definitely proposed that there should be formed an organization which should have for its object the study of American municipal conditions as a precedent to the formulation of a program of action. One speaker outlined the thought as follows:

"One important lesson of this Conference must have been impressed on the minds of all who have taken part in it. The municipal reformers have for many years been duplicating

one another's work unnecessarily. We have had no means of intercommunication; we have not been able to share one another's knowledge. In this country of ours there are examples of almost every kind of political experiment. If we only knew of these experiments, if we had some means of interchanging our dearly bought knowledge, we should save ourselves a deal of time and futile effort. I look to the formation or growth out of this Municipal Conference, and as its most valuable result, of some kind of National Municipal League, or National Municipal Council, call it what you please, but a central body to which information can be sent, and which will make it its business to gather information on its own account; to revise, condense, and compare reports made to it, and to keep the local centers of reform throughout the country in touch with one another. If you have a good thing in Philadelphia, a point in your charter, which we should have in New York, we should know it. If New York's experience will prove of any avail to Chicago, Chicago should have the benefit of it, if only by way of awful example. We have no desire to try experiments that have been tried and have failed already."

Nevertheless, there was a feeling, shared quite as much by those who held this view as by those who were doubtful of its wisdom or expediency, that the time was not yet ripe for a forward step in the direction of a Municipal Program.

The following preamble and resolution, as expressive of the sentiment of the meeting, was adopted without discussion:

"WHEREAS, The elements brought together in this Conference should not be allowed to separate without providing some permanent agency for continuing its work and promoting a comparison of views, the exchange of experiences, the discussion of methods, and that mutual confidence and sympathy which adds so much to the strength and enthusiasm of fellow-workers in a great cause; it is therefore

Resolved, That the President of this Conference is requested to appoint a representative committee of seven to prepare a plan for the organization of a National Municipal League, which shall be composed of associations formed in American cities, and having as an object the improvement of municipal government. Upon the completion of the plan and its approval by such associations, or as many of them as the said Committee may deem necessary, the Committee shall declare the proposed League to be fully organized, and prepared to enter upon its work."

Out of the Philadelphia meeting and of the Committee of Seven, appointed by the President thereof, in accordance with the foregoing resolution, grew the National Municipal League, formally organized in New York City in May, 1894. It at once entered upon its work, and proceeded to bring together through its affiliated membership the leading municipal reform organizations of the country; through its associate membership the leading students of municipal government; and through its annual conferences both these elements for a mutual exchange of views and a detailed study of the situation.

Thus far, conferences have been held in the cities of Minneapolis, Cleveland, Baltimore, Louisville, Indianapolis, and Columbus. The first four mentioned were devoted to a consideration of actual municipal conditions, and the papers presented bearing on the various phases of this subject formed an important contribution to the study of municipal government as it actually existed in the United States, and furnished a basis for municipal students in their work for the bettering of American municipal government.

The Louisville Conference, the fifth in the series, may in some respects be considered one of the most important held

up to that time. In the first place, the meeting will undoubtedly be remembered as marking the beginning of a new era in the work of the National Municipal League. Theretofore the meetings had been devoted to a statement of municipal conditions and to a discussion of the lessons which they taught. There had been no attempt, however, to formulate a program for adoption, or to construct a platform upon which municipal campaigns should be waged. No such effort had been made, because in the minds of those most actively identified with the League's management the time had not arrived when such a step was deemed either wise or advisable. Students of municipal government were not in a position to agree upon a statement of belief, mainly because they had not given to the general phases of the problem the necessary attention and study. Their particular experiences had been purely local, and they were ignorant of the conditions existing elsewhere.

The educational work of the League, its Conferences, and its published proceedings, had led the American people to a realization that there was an American municipal problem; that the question of good city government was something more than a merely local issue; that it was, perhaps, the most important single problem confronting the American people at the present time.

At Louisville the following resolution was adopted:

Resolved, That the Executive Committee appoint a Committee of Ten to report on the feasibility of a Municipal Program which will embody the essential principles that must underlie successful municipal government, and which shall also set forth a working plan or system consistent with American industrial and political conditions, for putting such

principles into practical operation; and such Committee, if it finds such Municipal Program to be feasible, is instructed to report the same, with its reasons therefor, to the League, for consideration."

Under appointment by the Executive Committee, the following consented to serve on the Municipal Program Committee: Horace E. Deming, New York, Chairman; George W. Guthrie, Pittsburg; Charles Richardson, Philadelphia; Frank J. Goodnow, New York; Leo S. Rowe, Philadelphia; Albert Shaw, New York; and Clinton Rogers Woodruff, Philadelphia. The first step taken by the members of the Committee was an exchange of suggestions through informal personal meetings and correspondence. These were consolidated and embodied in a series of preliminary reports and criticisms which were laid before a session of the Committee lasting from the 7th to the 12th of July, 1897. At this meeting, after a full and detailed discussion, the views of the Committee were reduced to the form of definite propositions, tentatively adopted, but subject to further examination and revision. A sub-committee was then appointed to elaborate these propositions into drafts of proposed constitutional amendments, and a general Municipal Corporations Act for further examination, criticism, and suggestion. The result of the work of the sub-committee, after receiving the critical comment of the other members of the General Committee, was embodied in a draft of proposed Amendments and an Act, and submitted to a meeting of the full Committee, held March 25 and 26, 1898. At this meeting a sub-committee was appointed to prepare a revised draft, in accordance with the conclusions reached as a result of the joint deliberations, and work up to this point. The revised draft and the comments