

CURRENT MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS

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The new Boston charter has been in operation now for nearly a year and most of its salient provisions have been put to the test. The most interesting feature of the new charter and the one upon which the framers of the enactment laid a great deal of emphasis is one giving to the State Civil Service Commission (a board of three members appointed by the governor of Massachusetts) the power to approve or disapprove all appointments made by the mayor of Boston. The charter requires that whenever the mayor nominates anyone to fill a city office (and practically all important offices connected with the city government of Boston are now made on the initiative of the mayor and not by direct election), he shall communicate this nomination to the civil service commission. In transmitting the name he shall, according to the terms of the charter, declare to the commission that his nominee "is qualified by training or experience" for the duties of the post to which his appointment is urged. If the civil service commission, after due investigation, finds that the mayor's nominee is so qualified, it so certifies, and the appointment becomes effective at once. But if, within the space of thirty days from the date of receiving the mayor's communication, the civil service commission does not certify its approval, the appointment does not go into effect and the mayor must name some other man for the post. The commission exercises therefore a sort of pocket veto over all the mayor's appointments whether to paid or unpaid positions. Since the charter went into effect Mayor Fitzgerald has sent to the commission more than a score of nominations. The commission has confirmed some, rejected others. It has interpreted the words of the charter in their proper sense and has exacted in each case that actual qualification through prior training or experience be shown before it will give its approval. In the case of some posts no extensive qualifications have been insisted upon because the duties of the office were of an elementary nature; in other cases it has put its exactions on a very high plane. In one case it refused to confirm, for the post of city collector, a man who had been confirmed by the United States Senate as postmaster of Boston and who had for two years been mayor of the city. The commission has insisted that appointees to municipal offices shall be reasonably qualified. It has not asked that the mayor appoint the best experts available; it has no power to ask that. But it has steadfastly declined to countenance any attempt

at payment of political debts at the expense of the city treasury. Appointments made since the new charter went into force have been of course not all that ardent municipal reformers could desire; but they have undoubtedly represented a very much higher standard than that set in any previous Boston administration.

The next annual meeting of the National Municipal League will be held at Buffalo from November 14th to November 16th inclusive. During their stay in Buffalo the members of the League will be the guests of the Buffalo Chamber of Commerce.

The Bureau of Municipal Research in New York City has issued a small handbook entitled *School Stories* (N. Y., 1909, pp. 88). The volume is made up of selections from school reports and is amply illustrated. Its aim is to bring to the attention of taxpayers, parents, teachers, and all those interested in the New York schools much valuable information put into attractive form.

The Cleveland Civil Service Commission has issued a report entirely exonerating Chief Kohler of the Police Department from all the charges recently filed against him with the mayor of the city by some of the citizens.

Resolutions in favor of a municipal harbor, or a series of docks and piers owned by the municipality were recently passed by the city council of Chicago. An order was accordingly issued instructing the harbor committee to take the various steps necessary to carry these resolutions into effect, including the making of application to the federal authorities for the necessary permission. The action of the city council is the result of the city's failure to come to terms with a private dock company which has been conducting negotiations with the municipal officials for some time.

A New York newspaper has made an interesting investigation of the sums spent by the city for newspaper advertising during the past four years. The enquiry shows that no less than \$5,000,000 was spent directly or indirectly for this purpose and that eighty publications depended either wholly or very largely upon the city treasury for their existence. It is the opinion of the city comptroller that fully one-half of this large expenditure was waste, and it is now proposed by the new administration

to place advertisements only in journals which can show adequate circulation and standing. In addition to the large sums spent on advertising New York maintains its own official publication and this has been conducted at a deficit which for the past fiscal year exceeded \$40,000. The new charter of Boston provided for the publication of a weekly record in which all the city's advertising should be printed. Its returns for the first few months of its career also disclose that it is published at considerable loss to the city.

At the last session of the legislature of Louisiana an enactment was made providing for the establishment of the commission system of city government in all the cities of the state having over 7000 population with the exception of New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Lake Charles.

Cleveland has, to some extent, followed the example set by Chicago in the establishment of a municipal court. In Chicago, the courts of justices of the peace were abolished altogether and the municipal court was established to take their place in December, 1906. The change there has been so successful that the idea has spread elsewhere.. Congress passed a law in February, 1909, creating a municipal court for the District of Columbia. In 1908, a commission was appointed in New York to investigate inferior courts, the result of which was the recommendation of a municipal court for Buffalo.

The municipal court for Cleveland will consist of five judges and will have original jurisdiction in the following cases: "(1.) In all civil actions and proceedings of which justices of the peace have or may be given jurisdiction. (2) In all civil actions and proceedings at law for the recovery of money or personal property of which the courts of common pleas, have, or may be given, jurisdiction, when the amount claimed by any party, or the appraised value of the personal property sought to be recovered, does not exceed one thousand dollars; and in such actions judgment may be rendered for over one thousand dollars when the excess over one thousand dollars shall consist of interest or damages or costs accrued after the commencement of the action. (3) All actions on contracts, expressed or implied, when the amount claimed by the plaintiff, exclusive of all costs, does not exceed twenty-five hundred dollars. (4) All actions in forcible entry and detainer. (5) All actions and proceedings whether legal or equitable, to enforce the collection of its own judgments. (6) All actions and proceedings of which police courts in cities have or may be given jurisdiction; and the

municipal court shall succeed to and have all the powers and exercise all the functions now had and exercised by the police court in said city of Cleveland."

The Court will also have appellate jurisdiction from justices of the peace. The Legal Aid Society and others interested in the reform of the present system have been trying for some time to secure a municipal court in order to overcome the evils of the courts of justices of the peace. The act creating the municipal court does not abolish the courts of justices of the peace, although it does abolish the police courts, but since the municipal court is given original as well as appellate jurisdiction in all cases which may come before justices of the peace, it is possible that the evils complained of will be eliminated.

St. Louis and Philadelphia have gone so far as to prepare bills for the establishment of such courts to take the place of justices of the peace, and the question has been discussed to some extent in Baltimore.

Early in July there was held at Schenectady a conference of mayors of the second and third class cities of the state of New York. The conference was devoted to a discussion regarding the essentials of municipal health, and was attended by representatives of forty-two cities. Addresses were made by Lawrence Veiller, Dr. Luther H. Gulick, Dr. George W. Goler, Homer Folks, Prof. Charles H. Zueblin, and others. Resolutions were passed advocating new health legislation and better methods of local sanitary administration.

The City Club of Chicago proposes to organize a permanent bureau to watch over, advise, and report on the methods and machinery of the Chicago governing bodies. This bureau will perform a service for Chicago similar to that performed for New York by the Bureau of Municipal Research, and will attempt to make permanent the reforms accomplished by the Merriam commission.

The ninth International Housing Congress was held in Vienna, Austria, from May 30 to June 4. Representatives were present from many of the European countries and from the United States. Discussions were had regarding municipal ownership of dwellings or land, municipal loans for private building, tenement houses, and other questions with reference to the problem of municipal housing.

The Bethlehem Institute of Los Angeles has established a municipal reference bureau. A reference library is to be established, and will contain, as far as possible, municipal reports and periodicals, and the best literature upon the various subjects relating to municipal administration. A lecture and press clipping service will also be organized, and a social survey of the city of Los Angeles is planned.

The Second National Conference on City Planning and Congestion was held at Rochester, N. Y., on May 2 to 4, and was attended by a large number of persons. A permanent organization was effected under the name of the American Conference on City Planning, and annual meetings will be held. The papers read at these conferences are to be published in full, and an annual membership fee of five dollars is to be charged.

The election of the London County Council took place on Saturday, March 5. In the outgoing Council there were seventy-nine Municipal Reformers and thirty-nine Progressives. In the new elections there were returned sixty Municipal Reformers and fifty-eight Progressives, although the Municipal Reformers had a much greater proportion of the popular vote. After the election a proposal was made to the Progressives that a non-partisan administration should be conducted, but this proposal was rejected, and the Municipal Reformers obtained a safe working majority by choosing the ten new aldermen entirely from their own party.

The *Year Book* for 1910 of the Civic League of St. Louis (pp. 83) contains a summary of the work accomplished during the previous year, and also an address by President Harry Pratt Judson on Civic Righteousness.

There was held at Providence, R. I., in July a conference on street cleaning, which was attended by officers representing thirty-eight New England cities and several cities in New York and New Jersey. The meeting was held under the auspices of the Bureau of Social Research of Providence. Another similar conference is planned for next year.