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LIVING DEMOCRACY SERIES

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October 1955*

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Civic Education Foundation

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

*When leaders speak with courage
and citizens wake up, there's no
community in America that can't
be made a better place to live in.
The fight may sometimes be both
long and tough, but it's worth what
it takes.*

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PREVIEW OF COMING ATTRACTIONS

Perhaps when you read the stories in this pamphlet you won't think they are attractive! After all, what's so attractive about a community that has to have a clean-up fight just to become self-respecting?

Furthermore, most of you who read this pamphlet are living in cities and towns that have pretty respectable governments—where there is little or no graft, nothing scandalous, where the officials go about their daily duties with their eyes on doing their jobs well. This nation could hardly have gone so far as it has unless the great majority of our people had been honest and right-dealing.

But it is a fact that the citizens in some places have been careless about their local governments. They have let the public business get into bad hands. There are selfish, scheming, tricky men in many a town and city who will put your hard-earned tax money into their own pockets — if you let them. So you can read in this pamphlet about a few places where the citizens finally woke up and got busy — with good results. These tales are all true — and they tell of good, hard fighting for clean government.

Included also is a story about a town whose people have long thought they were doing pretty well for themselves. Even those citizens, however,

were not quite satisfied. They tried to make their good town better. So it must be everywhere, if citizens want to have the best in government. Good government doesn't come easily. It takes a spirit of wanting to put that extra polish on an already shiny job. It takes the spirit that has made our country the envy of the world in mass production, business, and invention. No city is so good that it can't take another shot in the arm. And in a democracy the citizens carry the needle!

Now democracy is not a thing written in a book, or completed in the Constitution. Nor is it something that was all finished and wrapped up in 1776 or 1864 or 1917 or 1945. Democracy is a life that is being lived and relived from day to day by ordinary citizens like the people in your house and in your town. Democracy depends upon you and your folks to build it higher and stronger every day.

We have written this pamphlet about communities that were smart enough to see what was needed and then do something about it. Perhaps you may see in these stories what it takes to make our cities and towns as good as they ought to be.

Then, if you know the facts, you can help to keep your town the kind of place you will want to live in always.



1. CINCINNATI--A SHINING EXAMPLE

The Shot Heard 'Round the Wards

Tuesday, October 9, 1923, was just another autumn day in the quiet city of Cincinnati, Ohio. That is, for most people it was quiet. But three young fellows, one lawyer and two reporters, found themselves playing around the edges of an explosion. The explosion still echoes in that town, and it was a good deal like that shot the farmers fired at Concord in 1775. For it started a revolution in boss-ruled Cincinnati, one of enormous importance to the town's embattled citizens.

Years before, someone had called this old city "corrupt and contented." But down at the Literary Club rooms on East Eighth Street discontent was stirring. Here, on that Tuesday night, there was a meeting of the Cincinnati Association, an energetic group of about fifty young men, mostly of conservative Republican families, who were trying to do something with the dreams many of them had picked up during the First World War. Started three years earlier, this Association had been taking on civic problems as they came. Tonight's discussion was

to be about a proposed increase in taxes. Two members were scheduled to speak: one, Leonard Smith, for the new tax levy, and one, Murray Seasongood, against it.

Let's take an imaginary close-up view of the proceedings. A member sitting near the door beckons us to slip into seats in the rear of the room, which we do on tiptoe, for Mr. Seasongood is speaking. What he is saying is something like this:

"What more need I say, gentlemen? Just because most of us are Republicans, are we to meet here week after week and meekly take what that gang at City Hall hands out to us? I say, No!"

The speaker has been holding the attention of his audience. Attractive and magnetic in personality, he has hit upon a theme of constant interest to citizens of the "Queen City" — taxes.

"Gentlemen," he continues, "let's take a look at our fair city. Bad streets, undermanned police and fire departments, garbage collection that reeks, money leaking from every door and window at City Hall. The country calls our town the worst governed in the whole land. And why?"

"Well, I think we must admit that, although we love our homes and our families, we have neglected to take care of our civic housekeeping. For years we permitted George B. Cox to boss this city. And now he has given the reins over to his Man Friday, 'Rud' Hynicka.* It's bad enough to let a boss rule supposedly intelligent peo-

*You can make this name rhyme with *Bud High-nick-a*.

ple, but it's insulting to have one who doesn't even bother to stick around the town, but runs it by telephone from a backstage room in his burlesque show in New York! Are we proud of it?"

"And all of this in the name of the Grand Old Party, the party of Lincoln, the party that freed the slaves long years ago. Yet, gentlemen, the gang that calls itself Republican in this town has made slaves of thousands of voters, telling them how and when and how often to vote.

"I know what you are thinking. You are wondering if Cox and Hynicka haven't kept the taxes pretty low. They haven't. Our taxes are high. But what good are taxes, high or low, if the money is wasted? They tell us they have no money for this, no money for that. What I want to know is: What becomes of the money?"

"We have the fourth largest expenditure per head of population of any city in the country. What do we get for it? Nothing, absolutely nothing! In what other city would the people put up with a gas rate which was ordered by a boss who telegraphed it from six hundred miles away, after the City Council had refused to pass it? We do in Cincinnati.

"When a person calls at City Hall to ask for an improvement, he is sorrowfully shown the condition of the building, the cracked and unwashed windows, leaky roof, and dirty walls.

"I for one believe the time has come to cut off every extra tax levy, bond issue, or anything else that will give that bunch a chance to squander

money. Make them produce results on what they have, or get out! That means, gentlemen, we must vote *No* on the new tax levy.”

The applause is loud and long as Seasongood takes his seat. There is some grumbling, too, from those who are already in the boss's corner. Down front the two cub reporters scribble furiously. As far as this story is concerned, the meeting is over. No vote is taken, but at least the members of the Cincinnatus Association refused to endorse the tax levy.

And that was that. Or was it?

Win, Tie, or Fight

Let's look at these two bosses mentioned by Mr. Seasongood in his speech. They were known as "Old Boy" Cox and Rudolph (or "Rud") Hynicka. They were bosses of the kind that some of our big cities have had on their necks at one time or another. They seemed always to have everything in the bag — everything under control, especially jobs, favors, and fat contracts for their friends.

How do such things ever happen? Well, in a democracy it all goes back to *getting votes*. The men in office — the bad ones just as much as the good ones — have to get votes, first to gain power, then to stay in power. A boss may not seek public office himself, but put someone else in office, someone who will do what the boss tells him to do. But the boss must have the votes for his man. How does he get them? In many ways — most of them bad, though some of them look sweet and friendly till you know what the pay-

off is. The boss lends money, gives away food or clothing, gets people out of trouble with the courts or the police, helps criminals escape detection, pays for votes outright — and does a lot of other things besides, as you will see.

And finally he builds an organization or captures one already in existence. This means that he finds or buys enough men in some local Party Committee (the Republican Committee, the Democratic Committee, or the Committee of some other Party — it doesn't matter) to get his candidates



endorsed and labeled as regular Party nominees. Then all good Party members (who don't suspect what is up behind the scenes) will vote for them.

That trick, along with a lot of others, was worked in Cincinnati. Although the Cincinnati bosses were known by the Party name "Republican" and had a tie-up with that Party in the state, and maybe in the nation, the Republican Party itself meant little to them. They wouldn't have minded being called Democrat or Socialist, or by

any other name. They worked their way into the Republican organization in order to take it over for their own purposes. Their Party label was only a convenient way of gaining their ends.

Remember, this is not the picture in all cities, and in many cities it has never been a true picture. Whenever this sort of thing has happened, the people have let it happen because they went about their personal business without looking after their public business. Cincinnati under Boss Cox was a bad case of sleeping sickness in politics.

Cox was a self-made boss. There was something to admire in the way he made his own way to the top. From a poor home which had early lost its breadwinner by death, Cox rose from bootblack and newsboy until, near the end of his career, he became boss of Cincinnati, a millionaire, and—on the side—president of a bank. In politics, although he was defeated when he ran for Clerk of Courts, he could deliver votes for other candidates. All through his thirty years as boss of Cincinnati's "Republican" machine, he got more and more power by going after more and more votes and getting control of them. In the end, he could make or break any man with political ambitions in Cincinnati. If a man wanted to run for public office or keep the office he already had, he had to make his choice—either do what Cox wanted or try to pull enough voters away from the Cox machine to elect himself and his friends. And he usually figured

that Cox had the votes—so why "buck the machine"?

Cox was tough physically. As a saloonkeeper he was known best for his ability to jump across the bar from a flat-footed stand and toss out of his place (known as "Dead Man's Corner") anyone who challenged him or made any trouble. Cox kept his finger on everything that went on in Cincinnati. He led a huge political army, kept property owners on the defensive because he could "soak" them with high assessments, rewarded his friends with soft jobs at City Hall or the Court House, and punished his enemies in all kinds of ways.

Many of his gang were welcomed in the best lodges and fraternal groups in Cincinnati. They were received socially in some of the good homes of the city. And numerous churches were flattered when their members were chosen for city jobs or their pastors were consulted by this same Boss Cox. He became a big shot in the financial world, too, when he finally bought control of a Trust Company. Even in this top job of president, Cox had his eye on the little fellow, who usually owed his job to the city boss. As an example of his lifelong aim to "make friends and influence people," Cox's letter to the schoolteachers of Cincinnati is a classic. To them he wrote this simple message: "I will be greatly pleased to have your business and support, and to have you call on me at the bank." Invitation or command? Take your choice!

His gang had no other standard than that which Cox's boyhood base-

ball team had adopted as its motto: "Win, Tie, or Fight." Woe unto anybody who tangled with that Osceola baseball team, or with Cox's political team in later years!

When Cox died, the job slid into the hands of his lieutenant, "Rud" Hynicka, who operated a chain of burlesque shows on the side — or, as some thought, operated the city on the side. Hynicka had not escaped trouble, for on one occasion the courts caught up with him and his gang. Almost overnight Hynicka had to pay back to the county more than \$214,000 to avoid going to jail for dishonest handling of funds. It might have been better for Cincinnati if Hynicka had gone to jail.

Where Were the People?

You may ask that again. You may ask it of citizens of other places, big and little — places like Jersey City and Memphis and Kansas City. Look at your own town, too, because political bosses come in various sizes. They don't stop with the big places.

In answer to the question, in Cincinnati the people were going about their business that Tuesday evening, back in 1923. Not citizenship business, to be sure. Almost any evening you would find a good many of them at home, engaged in their usual activities. The kids were studying their lessons; Dad was working at the new-fangled radio, with black earphones clamped over his head; Mother was washing the dishes. Down at the neighborhood movie, lots of people were watching Greta Garbo and John

Gilbert in a silent screen romance. Fountain Square downtown was crowded with people out for an airing. Hundreds of citizens, young and old, were at the night schools — both at the municipal university on Clifton Heights and the high schools. Others were enjoying thrilling rides on the quaint inclined railroads that moved up and down the faces of Cincinnati's steep hills.



Some Were Awake

Every city, however, contains some people, often large groups of them, who are doing something besides attending to their home chores or amusing themselves. There are always some who have their eyes on the job of citizenship.

So it was in Cincinnati. These "good burghers," of a town deeply tinged with the traditions of liberty-loving Germans who had come there in 1848, had taken more than one crack at the rotten politicians.

From 1870, when determined citizens formed a Committee of Safety to protect the welfare of the city, to 1908, and again in 1912, when the State Legislature tried unsuccessfully

to curb Boss Cox, Cincinnati had seen a number of civic outbursts. And old-timers even remembered the riots of 1884, before Boss Cox's time, when enraged citizens sought to meet the same kind of misgovernment by burning the Court House during three weeks of violence and bloodshed.

So it went. A fight here. A fight there. But always, until 1923 at least, on top stood Old Boy Cox and, after him, Rud Hynicka. As a writer in *Collier's* said: "If ever a city was owned by someone other than the citizens it was Cincinnati; no feudal baron ever owned a townful of medieval goofuses more completely than Rudolph Hynicka's gang owned the city government. . . . They helped public utility companies to reach the pocketbooks of citizens via car fares, gas meters, and other routes. . . . At the City Hall officials supposed to be guardians of the welfare of citizens and of the city's funds — did nothing."*

1923

Well, Seasongood wasn't Hynicka's man. And the two cub reporters were not his, either, for by Wednesday morning about everybody in Cincinnati who could read knew that there had been a blast at the meeting of the Cincinnati Association. The papers told the story of the man who had dared to take on the gang. Some voices were raised against him in anger. These came from the machine, which promptly trotted out its best speakers to take care of Seasongood, the young

*William G. Shepherd, "Stolen City." *Collier's*, December 24, 1947.

lawyer who had, single-handed, offered to fight them on the tax levy.

Seasongood himself, member of a prominent Cincinnati family that had come from Germany before the middle of the nineteenth century, was risking his professional career. He knew that some of the courts and the prosecuting attorney might make his job as a lawyer a pretty tough proposition. Even his friends were a little shy of him. Big businessmen would say to him: "Look, Murray, I'm for you, of course. But please don't let people see us talking together. And don't use my name."

Maybe they were afraid Cox would raise the assessment on their buildings, or influence customers to cancel orders, or get the banks to refuse loans. Cox had plenty of ways of scaring people. And if he couldn't scare them he moved in on them. He studied their weak spots — to whom they owed money, what jobs they hoped to get for themselves or their relatives, any scandal in their families. Then he put the heat on.

No wonder Seasongood compared himself to the old Civil War veteran whose grandson asked, "Gee, Grandpop, didn't anybody help you win the war?" It was as bad as that in Cincinnati.

But Murray Seasongood, Harvard graduate, lawyer, skilled debater, gradually began to pick up interference in this rough-and-tumble game. He had declared that he would not vote more money for the gang. He told the people why and asked them for help. He said the city needed a new kind

of government, the council-manager form. To those who were timid and advised him not to upset things, Seasongood said, "When you have to sleep on the floor, you needn't be afraid of falling out of bed. You can't go any lower. Let's start to get up on our feet."

An Uphill Fight

Few people in Cincinnati felt it safe to question the honesty of the City Council when it asked for money. The fact was, with its funds wasted as they were, the city really needed money. That is why, no doubt, one of the city's newspapers called Seasongood's speech "sabotage from an unexpected quarter."

But why didn't they think? They should have asked, "Who are these birds who are always asking for more money?"

They would have learned something had they asked that question. That City Council — a group of thirty-two men — was spending about \$10,000,000 each year for city operations. Only one of the thirty-two was a Democrat. He was a very polite one, and no wonder, for the others were mostly counted as members of the Cox-Hynicka gang. Seven of these guardians of the public funds were professional men, that is, lawyers, doctors, and so on. Twenty were in some kind of business, seven or more having to do with the liquor traffic. Another handful operated what were politely called "disreputable resorts." Three of them had no other occupation than "politics." Truly it

was a small-time crowd to be operating a big-time city government.

At times the city had been able to wangle mayors who were well-meaning "prominent citizens"; but they usually had trouble with the Council gang, for the boss knew how to handle the councilmen. As to the accomplishments of most of the mayors during this period, the less said the better. The best some of them could do was to boast about how much they wanted to keep in touch with the citizens. They were like the mayor of another city, who put the matter very simply: "I used to be in business," said His Honor, "and I always believe in seeing the customer. My door is open, and if I ain't there, all you got to do is holler, 'Where is that — slob?'"

So the boss could manage a mayor; and the boss's ward heelers of the Cincinnati machine were no more genteel than the mayor just quoted. The ward heelers controlled the voting by force or fraud. They told the illiterate voters, "Now, youse guys, put your X under the chicken with the short legs." That was the eagle, the Republican emblem on the ballot. A cross under the eagle was a vote for all the candidates in that column. In those days, ballots were printed that way almost everywhere. In Cincinnati, it was a big help to the bosses. As a way of handling a block of ten thousand votes, what could be simpler?

A Barrel of Troubles

Over the years the people had built up a whole list of charges against the so-called Republican machine. One

complaint was poor enforcement of laws. Gambling, drug and liquor peddling, vice of all kinds flourished openly in the "Queen City." The police were tied up with the gang, for every policeman knew he could be fired if he did not do the machine's bidding; so hardly anyone was surprised when Federal officers finally sent more than fifty of Cincinnati's "finest" to the Federal prison at Atlanta for violating drug and liquor laws.

Many were angry at a "spoils system" that permitted favorites to get jobs, contracts for city work at excessive prices, and rake-offs from the city and county banking business. People who co-operated with the gang in order to get jobs or favors soon found out that they were expected to make "contributions" to the political treasury and to drum up votes at election time.

The work of the city was being done, in some cases, by people who knew little about what they were paid to do. Such was the case of the one-fingered typist who, when questioned, revealed the startling fact that before landing his job he had been a blacksmith! Even the passage of Civil Service laws didn't bother these people, for the gang took over the whole Civil Service system, Commissioners and all. They got their crowd in and kept others out, by using threats or promises to get the "right" people appointed.

But the big gripe was the handling of the city funds. Cincinnati was in bad shape financially. It had a bonded

debt of \$55,000,000, highest of any city in the country with a population of less than 700,000. Bonds were being issued to pay in forty years for streets that wore out in ten. The city had invested more than \$6,000,000 in what was called a subway, but the citizens called it a "rathole." To this day, track has not been laid, while here and there in the city stand crumbling surface stations, built but never used, a warning to the public against the waste due to bad government.

Some people complained about the taxes. It wasn't so much that Cincinnati was taxed more than other cities of the same size; the main complaint was that the money was thrown away. The city did not have services as good as those that other communities were getting for the same money or less. Much of the tax money was paid over to the county, where the Cincinnatians could not see it used. And the same gang ran both city and county!

And the public utilities — that is, the streetcar lines and the electric and gas companies — had been doing very well in their arrangements with the gang. Streetcar fares went up, and stockholders in the company were receiving dividends, yet the company told the city it was too poor to pay its annual franchise tax of only \$350,000. City light bills got higher and higher, along with the bills of the residents. In one year the company increased the price for lighting the streets \$100,000.

The streets of Cincinnati were a shame. One cartoon of the day showed a citizen, with head and arms barely sticking out of a big rut, crying pite-

ously: "Hey! Don't just help me! Get ready to pull my horse out, too!"

That isn't so laughable when you learn that a motorist whose car had run onto a sidewalk and killed two children was acquitted because he proved that the streets were so bad the accident could not be avoided!

Hard Going

Well, if you wanted to do something about these miserable conditions, you faced a tough job.

First of all, suppose you wanted to run for office, to break into politics as a good citizen. You had to run in the primaries as a candidate of either the Republican or the Democratic Party. But since the Party Committees selected the persons to run in the primaries, you couldn't work your way in unless you had Party backing.

And since the Republican Committee was under the control of the boss, and a Democratic candidate had little chance of being elected, an honest office seeker was in a bad spot.

Then, too, the gang controlled huge blocks of voters because the ballots were the old style, with Party symbols at the top of each column on the ballot. Any nitwit could vote for either the rooster or the "chicken," without being able to read at all. And many did, too — enough to keep the gang in power year after year.

Finally, even though the people in some neighborhoods were opposed to the gang and regularly voted against it, the machine politicians had strangled these neighborhoods by splitting them up among other areas which

the gang controlled. This meant that a good, independent neighborhood would be mixed with a gang neighborhood, thus losing its chance of electing a decent man of its own for the Council.

So in spite of the many attempts that had been made to correct and improve things, Cincinnati in 1923 was still not much better off than in 1873. One thing the good citizens had in their favor was a new home rule law, passed in 1912 by an amendment to the State Constitution, which gave cities the right to change their government if they saw fit. Cincinnati in 1923 was discontented and mad. It was ready to make a change.

Blow by Blow

ROUND 1 — 1923

Had the boys down at City Hall been smart, they would have ignored Seasongood in 1923. Instead, they did the usual thing; they called Seasongood "Socialist" and "Bolshevik"—choice names reserved for anyone who didn't want to knuckle under to them.

Seasongood answered every epithet with another speech. Cincinnati ate it up, as the Kiwanis, the Rotary, and other service, civic, and even social clubs demanded to know more and more about what could be done. Over and over Seasongood stressed just two big ideas: one, the city must refuse to vote more money to the political gangsters; and two, Cincinnati must start thinking about a change in the city government. Many began to think seriously of the city-manager plan for Cincinnati.

The boss and his henchmen became alarmed when they saw the citizens on the march. They reacted in the one way they knew about — to get the votes by hook or crook. They went all out to have their friends vote *Yes* on the tax levy. They used all their tricks, influencing people who owed them money or had received or wanted favors, trying to confuse the voters by misleading statements in public, making a great show of their interest in good government.

But this time the machine had missed the boat. Seasongood's growing influence had sold the city on the idea that to clean out City Hall the voters must first refuse to give the gang in office the money they said they needed. It wasn't simple, this victory. It took a lot of personal work. But the people did win out over the bosses. The *No* votes carried the day, and the machine was left with mighty little in the bag.

The gang responded by cutting down still further on the services to the city. They stopped repairing the streets. They turned off street lights early in the evening, "to save money," they said. They closed down a branch hospital for tubercular patients, practically throwing the inmates into the streets. Only some quick work by alert citizens brought about a reopening of the hospital.

ROUND 2 — 1924

While still in a daze from their trouncing, the leaders of the machine decided to bow to the will of the citizens by hiring a group of experts to

come in and survey the city. In this way, they hoped, they might stem the revolt against their rule. By midsummer the report of the experts was published. Then the citizens learned that the best way to haul Cincinnati out of its hole was to clean up the government and start fresh. This meant amending the city charter. And changing the charter called for work.

The workers were there. Under a very small group of men and women who started the "Birdless Ballot League" (no chicken, no rooster!), the movement for changing the charter got under way. And here begins the most cheering part of the Cincinnati story — how the men and women of that city worked out a campaign to bring to their city the blessings of good government. Starting with the "Birdless Ballot" group, adding some from the Cincinnati Association, and picking up others as the movement went on, hundreds of citizens finally enrolled under the banner of a new Charter Committee, pledged to gain a new form of government and to elect good candidates to run it.

Murray Seasongood and Henry Bentley were leaders in this movement, and they have been called by those who know most about city government in America "an incomparable team." The game that the Charter Committee had to play needed plenty of quarterback planning and plenty of pep talks from the coaches.

Their plans were simple and yet difficult to put through. They proposed to do away with the old thirty-two man Council and substitute a



nine-man group elected at large instead of from the wards. They proposed to place in the position then held by the mayor a trained executive who would serve as city manager. They proposed to elect the Council by the Hare system of proportional representation — a system which guarantees majority rule yet also makes it certain that smaller groups among the voters shall have some voice in the government. They didn't want honest people of any group shut out, Democrats, Republicans, Independents, or others. So they wrote the proposed new Charter.

Petitions were presented to place a charter amendment on the ballot. Suddenly two more charter amendments were proposed by the gang, in another effort to confuse the voters. But the Charter Committee was not going to lose by such a trick. Their organization was able to teach thousands of voters the way to vote for the Committee's amendment.

How they did all this is one of those stories that has inspired other cities all over the land. They had a speakers'

bureau of forty-three men and women, all trained to give talks before scheduled meetings. There were more than a hundred meetings on the list. Tons of literature were distributed by hundreds of volunteer workers. On election day, other hundreds worked at the polls, helped to get people to the polls to vote, or worked at the Election Board rooms, where the votes were counted. And they watched the count with eagle eyes, you may be sure.

Their work was successful. The year 1924 was another milestone in their march to civic improvement. Now, as Cincinnati voted two to one in favor of the amended Charter, there remained only one more thing to do: to elect a new Council of people friendly to the Charter. That brings us to 1925.

ROUND 3 — 1925

The 1925 picture was both bright and cloudy, as the gang, still fighting, did everything possible to gain control of the new Council. If they could get their men elected, the rest would be easy. It was understood that both the Republicans and the Democrats would put up tickets. But what should the

Charter Committee do? They could either endorse some of those nominated by the two Parties, or they could select nine of their own people to run.

They chose to do the latter. In May, 1925, the public was given the names of nine prominent Cincinnatians who had agreed to run for the first new Council under the banner of the Charter Committee. To the relief of everyone interested in good government, the Democrats decided to back the Charter candidates, some of whom they had suggested. That made the job a lot easier. One newspaper, *The Post*, backed all nine Charter candidates, while two other papers selected certain persons from each list to support. One paper, the *Times-Star*, backed only the candidates of the "Republican" machine.

An interesting situation developed among the machine Republicans, who had put up only six candidates in the hope that by concentrating on them they would gain control of the new Council with at least five winners. This scheme "backfired," because voting by proportional representation did not give it much chance. Also, certain of the Republican candidates chiseled on the others, working against their fellow Republicans in their desire to be elected.

Meanwhile, the Charter people stayed with the job of getting people to register for the election. They really succeeded, as 139,000 citizens registered to vote. It was a big turnout, for in 1924, in a special election on a number of bond issues, only 51,000

bothered to go to the polls. It took a lot of work — a lot of telephoning, a lot of doorbell ringing, a lot of talking. But they did it, the women on the Charter side helping mightily.

There was plenty of excitement, too, on election day. That election was a hot fight. Cautious as could be, the Charter people watched the ballots all day long, from the time they were dropped into the boxes until they were counted at Music Hall. Thirty taxis had been engaged by the Board of Elections to collect the boxes from the precincts. To guarantee their delivery the Board had placed two policemen in each taxi. In addition, the Charter people had secured thirty motorcycle detectives, instructing them to follow the taxis on every trip to see that no taxi, before delivering the ballots, detoured by some "accident" to a hide-out where the votes could be tampered with. Check and double check! No monkeyshines at this election!

And election day proved that when good citizens work together they can do wonders. The battle of 1925 resulted in the election of six persons from the Charter ticket to three from the machine crowd. The Charter people were in control.

In no time at all after the new Council took office in January, 1926, they elected Murray Seasongood Mayor of the city. The Charter people had agreed upon Seasongood in advance. He had campaigned as hard for the Charter in 1924 and the Charter ticket in 1925 as he had in his first fight against the machine in 1923.

On the Wings of the Morning

That is what the Cincinnati *Enquirer* said in 1926 as the new government took over: "Cincinnati has the opportunity, as it were, to rise on the wings of the morning."

The Post, steadfast supporter of the movement, said: "Already the people observe the benefits. . . . Though a revolution has taken place, there is no crippling of the business of the city. . . . The public job has become a public service."

Even the Republican *Times-Star*, which had been opposed to Seasongood and said harsh things about him, grudgingly admitted it had "never questioned the good intentions of the new Mayor . . . it will be rather pleasant to see him removed from the role of critic and bearing some of the responsibility of city government."

And the Columbus *Citizen* remarked: "Watch Cincinnati. Unless we are mightily mistaken you'll see that city take some forward steps in the next few years."

Mr. Seasongood's selection as Mayor was a tribute to leadership. Under the new Charter, the Mayor had some important appointments to make and had to act as the spokesman of the administration. It was the city manager, however, who was to have major charge of the city's operations.

This job was filled by the selection of Colonel C. O. Sherrill, who had been making a fine reputation as an administrator in Washington, D. C. Sherrill made a splendid statement as he entered this difficult position. "If

during 1926 I find it necessary to do disagreeable things," he said, "I hope to do them in a kindly and gracious way without malice and without leaving a sting." He must have succeeded, for after leaving for another position, he was called back again to be Manager of Cincinnati.

Sherrill took his job as housecleaner seriously. Not only did he clean up the political mess; he cleaned streets and buildings, too. On the ceiling of a corridor in City Hall, the cleaning brought out a painted design that had been invisible for twenty years! The Colonel put in a better system of traffic lights, put up street signs to aid the stranger in finding his way about, gave new hope to the police, and put new life into the old machine-ridden Civil Service system. Open and honest purchasing saved the city vast sums of money.

In four short years a confident city had voted \$24,000,000 for public improvements. In 1925 alone one hundred thousand voters approved thirteen bond issues totaling \$6,000,000; whereas the year before a slim turnout of voters had refused to vote approval of a single issue. In only three years the city did thirty per cent more work on the streets than the old gang had done in ten years. In 1927 and again in 1934 and 1935 the city brought about large reductions in gas and electric rates. Each year saw the debt reduced, and still on January 1, 1936, every city fund reported a balance. In the old days, Cincinnati paid \$67,000 per mile for sewer construction — under the new government, \$47,000.

Street oiling that formerly cost \$5.75 for fifty feet was now being done for 97 cents. Under the Cox-Hynicka rule, contractors were paid top prices, then split with the gang. And they chiseled on the work besides. During the 1937 flood, the city, though imperiled by the raging river, loss of utilities, and a threat to the supply of drinking water, never lost control of its functions for a moment.

Cincinnati, which in 1924 had been nearly bankrupt, in 1944 had one of the highest credit ratings in the entire country. As the *New York Times* said in commenting on Cincinnati's ability to stay strong during bad times, "Out of that depression Cincinnati has emerged with a marvelous record."

All-American 1949-1950

Yes, twenty-five years later the Queen City of the West, once again deserving the title given it by Longfellow, was listed two years running in the Minneapolis *Tribune* as one of an eleven-member team of All-American Cities. A jury of experts, in a project conducted jointly by the National Municipal League and the *Tribune*, picked Cincinnati twice, not because of a new civic battle but because the fruits of its old victory had not been lost or stolen. Some cities win their reform battles once, and later lose what they have gained. But in Cincinnati the people kept a government on which they could rely and voted bond issues for the improvements their government proposed.

And Now —

In any city there may be a crowd

who want to make the most of city government for their own pockets. Cincinnati showed how any such crowd can be licked. The fact is that today thousands of people of all parties in Cincinnati know that their Charter is good. A lot of die-hards (and the machine politicians) still take pot shots at the Charter form of government or at the proportional representation method (the Hare system) of selecting the Council. They do this whether the control is Republican or Charter. But it can be said for Cincinnati today that now a citizen votes more nearly for his choice of candidates among many that are all right — not for the old gang or for the reformers, as once was the case.

Sometimes the Charter Committee has a majority in the City Council, sometimes the Republicans. But the manager plan and good government go on just the same. Since 1925, the City Council, regardless of party, has looked like a collection of first-class citizens, men and women of ability, of personal and public honesty. The people of Cincinnati no longer elect candidates for public office who will permit or share in graft for personal or party advantage.

Now, in any election, the citizens of Cincinnati can choose from among a score or more of good candidates. Through the years both parties now active in local government have given to the city well-trained and sincere leaders. Men of all shades of political thought, of many vocations, of different races and different creeds, have found their way to Council seats at

City Hall. The leaders in Cincinnati have seen to it that citizens like Seasongood, the late Russell Wilson, James G. Steward, Willis Gradison, Charles P. Taft — to mention but a few — find it possible and important to serve their city.

It must be a grand and glorious feeling to pick up a Council ballot now, knowing that good government is made more likely by the type of men who choose to run and by citizens who watch nominations and discuss public questions fully and fairly.

Cincinnati stands today under the banner of good government, a government that was instituted and is supported by its citizens. It is a government devoted to giving to Cincinnati every good thing that city life is supposed to offer and as much as honest spending of the tax dollar can buy. A little cautious about going overboard on spending, Cincinnati

still maintains top-notch city services; nationally prominent public schools and a municipal university of more than 16,000 students; a good city health and recreation program; and a library and other cultural offerings like those of other big cities. Its Symphony Orchestra, May Festival, Summer Opera, Opera in English, and other musical activities give it a touch that the early residents would be proud of.

With low taxes, low indebtedness, and efficient spending, the city is healthy, prosperous, and safe. It points the way to good government because, having won the prize in 1924, it still holds on to it by the public spirit and the vigilance of its citizens. Of course good government is never won in a single fight and then kept, with no further effort. Citizens who wake up once can't go to sleep again!



2. PRINCIPLES AND A YARDSTICK

You may be keen for good government. Your folks may agree with you on that. But if they ask you what good government *is*, particularly in your own town or city, you may not be able to tell them.

If the story of Cincinnati has made your eyes shine, perhaps you feel like getting up in some meeting and raising the banner of reform, just as Mr. Seasongood did in 1923. But your community may not need just that same medicine. Perhaps your local government is not in the hands of rascals at all; so you would only be mak-

ing trouble for yourself and everybody else if you shouted, "Throw the rascals out!" If reform in your town is needed, exactly what reform should it be?

Well, that is something you and your folks will have to find out by looking closely at the way things are going at the Town Hall, or the City Hall, or the Courthouse, and on the streets, and in the schools, and wherever else your local government does business. The best this pamphlet can do is to give you some guideposts for your search; and this chapter will do that as straightforwardly and simply

as possible. Of course you can't find out all about good government from a few pages; but if you will study this chapter carefully, it will give you a start on the job of citizenship in your own community. The chapter will tell you, anyway, what some of the big questions are. Then if you ask those questions and get the answers by digging for them, you won't be wandering around in a daze or going off in the wrong direction.

The rest of the pamphlet will give you some other examples of civic action, different from Cincinnati's, but pretty exciting in their own way. There is much to learn about good local government — what its *ideals* should be and how you can tell whether you are moving toward those ideals in your own community or away from them — or just standing still.

What to Take for Granted

You can take it for granted that you won't get much done if the voters stay at home on election day. Every election counts, and the primaries are especially important.

You can be sure that voting a "straight party ticket" doesn't help much, usually. Sometimes it may be the best thing to do, as voting the Charter ticket was in Cincinnati. But the voters ought to know the candidates and what they stand for. That means going behind party labels, good looks, glib speeches, and blaring sound trucks, and the signs and slogans of a campaign. Who is this man or woman who is running for office? What does the candidate know about the job

he seeks? What are his or her ideas about public business — your business? Things like that are what you want to know.

If you, John Q. Citizen, want honesty in public affairs, wise spending of public money, and competence in your elected officials, you must keep the political house clean in your own home town. Those who seek office can't be expected to do the whole job; and those who want favors are likely to clean house to suit themselves.

Good government has been studied and restudied. Book after book has been written about it. There are associations and leagues and committees that spend time and money to find out how democracy can be made to work better in our local communities. There are experts in this field now, such as the people in the National Municipal League. We can tell you some of their conclusions about what makes a local government good.

But the experts themselves would tell you one thing more about what to take for granted: *it takes good men and women to make any plan work.*

Remember what happened to the Civil Service system in Cincinnati? The bosses took it over. Civil Service is a good thing — *when honest and intelligent people are running it.* No government is any better than the people who have charge of it. Good people can run poor government machinery, bad people can wreck good machinery. And when we have good machinery in the hands of good people, we can go places! In a democracy, it is the voters who decide what kind

of folks to put in charge of the public business.

Now let's suppose you have all this in mind and want to go to work to put good men and women into public office. Are there any things you ought to be sure of as you pick your slate? Any things your candidates ought to be sure of? Any things to check on before you choose your candidates at all?

Here is what the experts say.

A Good Government Yardstick

1. *A few big jobs for a few big men.* That's another way of saying what the experts call "fixing responsibility." If your town (or city or county) has a lot of little jobs that have to be filled by voting for a lot of candidates, the public business will be all divided up among small officeholders, and there will be too much campaigning and backbiting. Things will be at sixes and sevens. It will take too much time and talk to get things done. You will get too many people in the jobs, with little or no training, all jealous of their own power, resentful of "interference," and ready to duck out of responsibility to anyone higher up.

Cincinnati reduced its Council from thirty-two to nine and hired a City Manager. It's easier to watch one man than a dozen. Any big business calls for somebody at the top who has authority and can take the blame if things go wrong, or get his due credit if they go right.

Don't put up with a government that hasn't any real head man or small group of men.

This is a general principle, of course, and there may be exceptions. But a government that is all broken up into little pieces, each to be fitted into the puzzle by politics, is a hard government for citizens to watch, clean up, or nail down.

2. *A short ballot.* If the voters are asked to vote for a lot of candidates for all sorts of offices — and on a lot of referenda besides — how can you expect anything but confusion? On election day, the voters should know what they are doing. Work for a short ballot, with clean-cut choices. A few candidates for offices that carry authority can be discussed and sized up; fifty or a hundred can't. And one question on the ballot, to be answered *Yes* or *No*, can be answered by the voters with



some understanding, if it has been debated during the campaign; whereas five or six questions will be likely to get everybody mixed up. A long, complicated ballot makes people discouraged about voting at all. Keep the ballot short.

3. *A budget folks can understand.* Government costs money — *your* money. How is your town or city going to get it — by taxes? by borrowing? by charging for its services? How much does it need? Could it get along with less or should it spend more? Is it paying its employees too little or too much? Is it wasting what it has?

If nobody can get the answers to such questions, something must be wrong.

Economy may be as bad in one place as lavish spending is bad in another; but if taxes are to go up in order to give the local government more money, the voters should know what the money is to be spent for. They should know how long it will take to spend it, how much is needed now, and how much in six months or a year.

A well-run family or a well-run business works on a budget. A good government should know what its income is going to be and what its expenses are going to be. And it should tell the whole story to the voters, with plenty of time and opportunity for the people to study the budget before it is put through. If your city or town doesn't publish its budget, you can ask why it doesn't. You can raise the question in your family and get some voters to raise it in a meeting or in a letter to the local paper.

4. *Appointments on merit.* Many jobs in the local government — especially jobs that are permanent — should be under Civil Service. All jobs should be filled by competent people, with whatever training or experience the jobs require; and promotions should be made on the basis of honest work well done. If your town or city is handing out jobs as rewards for political services, the jobs won't be well done. If officeholders are asked to make "contributions" to political campaign chests, they need protection. If your public business — even the smallest part of it — is in the hands of political hangers-on, who loaf on the job, *you* need protection.

Find out how the government jobs in your community are filled. Who makes the appointments? Do the officeholders work at their jobs? Are the jobs getting done on time? Are the workers polite and helpful to people who need their services? You can get the answers to such questions by reading your town or city reports, by following newspaper editorials and letters on local government, or by a little "sleuthing" in the town or city offices.

Don't expect perfection. Remember that public officials are often busy and bothered. Still, it is not too much to expect the public business to be so managed that it can usually be done properly, promptly, and courteously.

5. *Proper division of the work.* Is there confusion and overlapping in the work to be done by your city or town government? The men who trim trees for your government should be able to trim them for the Park Department,

the School Department, and any other Department that has trees to be trimmed. No need for each Department to hire its own tree trimmers. No need for a separate set of electricians, plumbers, auditors, or lawyers for each Department — at least not in places of moderate size.

There are natural ways of dividing the work to be done — and other ways that are confusing and expensive. If the people who work for your town or city have too little to do or get in one another's way or "pass the buck" from one department to another, the work isn't organized right. That needs looking into. Why not send an invitation to your Mayor (or your City Manager) to explain to the Student Council how the business of your community is set up?

6. *A sound plan for growth.* A growing community must look out for fire hazards, slums, the spoiling of residential areas by the building of factories, the proper location of schools and playgrounds, provision of parking space, and a lot of other practical problems. Is there a plan for your city or town? Are there zoning regulations? Or is there confusion, unfairness, or dishonesty in such matters?

Plans on paper may be published and look good; but are the plans carried out? Are the regulations enforced? If not, is it because a few experts made the plans, and the public never knew much about them — or cared? If the people have no voice or part in planning, even good plans may soon become dead letters.

It takes a look behind the scenes to get the low-down on this sort of thing. The house your family buys or builds may soon be worth only a fraction of its present value if your local government doesn't stick by its published plans, or if the plans are too poor to stick to. How about a talk in your school assembly by some local official in charge of community planning?

So here is a sound general yardstick for good local government. Other points could be noted on the yardstick, but these six are enough to start with. If you will keep constantly in mind the fact that it is *people* who run our governments, the six points here outlined will help you to think about what such people should do and how they should be organized to do it. One expert said recently, "I'm not so much interested in good government as I am in good people." Still, good people, backed by a wide-awake public, are very likely to go after these self-same "yardstick" points. Let's end the chapter by putting them down again, as if they were really points on a yardstick. They are certainly worth remembering.

And then, the big addition to the Yardstick: **GOOD PEOPLE!**

GOOD PEOPLE in government are the biggest help of all. But remember this, too: the best people in the world won't get much done unless they are in close touch with the voters, know what they want, act always in their service — in short, are truly their *representatives*.

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|----|-------------------------------|--|
| 6 | FIX
RESPONSIBILITY | Make a few well-chosen people responsible, give them the proper authority, and watch them. |
| 12 | SHORT BALLOT | Keep the ballot short. Do nothing to confuse the voters. |
| 18 | BUDGET | Insist on a budget for the government that folks can understand. |
| 24 | MERIT SYSTEM | Watch appointments and promotions. Protect yourself and your public workers by a merit system. |
| 30 | ORGANIZE | See that the work of your government is organized to prevent waste and to lead to improvements. |
| 36 | PLANNING | Find out about planning and zoning — on paper and in fact. Get the people in on it all along. |



3. DES MOINES--CITY WITH A PLAN

Great Day for the Race!

So the jokesters were wisecracking on April 30, 1949, as they greeted friends and neighbors. Indeed, it was a great day — good Iowa sunshine and a high, bright Iowa sky. To those who innocently asked, “What race?” the pranksters had three answers, instead of the usual one. Besides the old reply, “The human race,” they could add two

more — the Drake University Relays and the special election.

Most people in Des Moines have known through the years about the annual Drake University Relays, run about the end of April. Track stars from almost everywhere come to Des Moines for this yearly competition. Prizes and honors there are aplenty. All Iowa watches the Drake Relays. So they did on April 30th.

A great day for another race, too! A grim, political affair, matching a team that had suffered a sound licking some years before against a victorious team that seemingly could not be beaten. One team, which had previously lost, was for a change in government; the other fought to keep the old.

This day they were voting for the second time on the same issue—should Des Moines drop its old commission form of government and take on the city-manager form? You could tell they were voting, because the polling places were open; because men and women workers were buttonholing voters all over town, asking for support. You could tell it over at the Stadium, where the high school kids were carrying banners reminding the people to be sure to vote before going home. And more than 40,000 did vote that day.

More than half of them, it turned out, had voted to turn the tables. This majority was for making a bold new move. They were voting out of existence a plan of city government named for their own city—the Des Moines Plan. They were voting in the city-manager plan. They had to be humble about it, too, these more than 20,000, because in voting out the Commission government they were admitting that their system, prized all these years since 1907, was no longer worth keeping.

Time for Dinner

When the election was over that night, many a weary campaigner went

home as tired as a hunting dog after a long day in the brush. Especially tired were the women, for they had borne the brunt of the campaign. With the League of Women Voters taking the lead, the women had done much of the good work that had brought victory. One of them wrote a fine letter to a friend soon after the great day. She said, in closing, "I'm now just a housewife again, and it's time to get dinner, so I'll close now." That was Mrs. Katherine R. Stroud, president of the League, and one of the busiest workers in the entire campaign.

The Des Moines *Sunday Register* said of this hard-working group of women, "From start to finish, it was the women of the city who played the major role . . . and delivered the all-important vote which carried the plan."

The First Lap—the Thirties

It is unlikely that the women accepted full credit, though. As early as 1930 people were hoping to do something about the Des Moines government. Many groups, like the Kiwanis Club, the Bureau of Municipal Research, and others, had long been hoping for a change. They had reasons for these feelings and hopes.

There had been the usual problems in that city. For example, every administration had jobs to pass out. Many jobs had to be filled from Civil Service lists. But others were given to those who had performed political services for somebody. Most sensible people would prefer not to have to

perform political jobs in order to receive an appointment. But as in every town, if they had to bow their heads to that kind of system, men and women who needed work could hardly help trying to please those who had the appointing power. Add to this the thought that most councilmen depended somewhat upon their own appointees to keep them in office, and you have a rather poor picture of public service in the city of Des Moines.

Another thing: good administrators were not a dime a dozen in Des Moines. And good administrators usually do not care to mix up in politics. That left the Council jobs open to those who liked the honor, or the moderate salary, or the power that came with the jobs. It was not a good situation. During the height of the 1936 discussion, for example, a columnist for a Des Moines paper contributed this humorous and sarcastic tribute to the men who were then sitting as councilmen:

“Take the city council for example (*chorus of shouts: ‘You take ’em.’*). They’re elected for their pretty faces and their seductive voices. Why don’t more pretty girls go after the jobs? By accident, now and then, someone is elected to the city hall with a rough brutal idea of running the city government efficiently and economically. . . . This deplorable danger must be eliminated by forcing every candidate to sign an affidavit that he had never had any experience more formidable than running a hamburger stand at the state fair.”

Of course, all the councilmen were not stupid or dishonest or untrained. In cities like Des Moines, there are too many good people to stand for that. At times the type of men elected had seemingly justified the faith of the city in their Des Moines Plan, the plan of government by an elected commission.

But neither were all the councilmen fine, upstanding, intelligent persons. Des Moines had found that out in 1925 when the Bureau of Municipal Research, a citizen group, turned up some really juicy pieces of scandal about certain city departments. In fact, the Bureau was able to convince the courts that certain city employees would be doing better in the state prison!

One of these crooks, a city worker who was the sister of the Park Commissioner, realized that by telling her superiors that certain workers in her department were not able to come to the City Hall for their pay envelopes, she could pocket that money every week. It was easy, and nobody kicked for a long time, because the eighteen mysterious employees were just names she had thought up.

For a while it was very profitable. In a little more than a year this “lady” had milked the city treasury — and the taxpayers — of something more than \$23,000. Then the judge thought up something: seven years in prison!

Another of the payroll thieves was caught in San Antonio after he had prudently disappeared when things got warm. The Bureau of Municipal Research put up the reward that

brought him back to Iowa, and to prison.

Down at the garbage-disposal plant, the superintendent was having a lot of trouble with the trucks, which were forever needing repairs. The catch was that while he paid the bills to his favorite garageman, the trucks never did get repaired. Fact was, they didn't need repair. He and the garageman had a little understanding about that. Another prison sentence.

Equally annoying was the case of the "thrifty" timekeeper in one of the city departments who, though earning only \$150 a month, was able to bank about \$85,000 within fourteen months. He, too, joined the ranks of those serving time.

With a lively Bureau dogging the footsteps of the local officials, it was no wonder that the citizens began to see that their Des Moines Plan might be a little weak in spots. Some began to think in terms of a city manager for their city. Others, loyal to the old plan, thought that a change of faces was all that was needed. Thus it stood for a long time.

High Schools—Front and Center!

It was almost inevitable that the news about trouble in the city government should seep through to the boys and girls in the schools. Studying government in their classes and hearing about it at home made a happy combination for the students who were thinking about democracy and how to make it work. Then, too, they began hearing that while Des Moines was running annual deficits, other cities



of the same size were doing a lot better. Was it an accident that the other cities had city managers? Some of the students wondered.

In 1936, the students at Roosevelt High blossomed out suddenly with a political organization — the Junior City Manager League. This new organization, blessed by a school system that encouraged young people to think for themselves, had been encouraged by the teachers to go into action. The idea spread to other schools — East High, North High, and Abraham Lincoln High. The pupils set up a downtown office, with a telephone and with regular office hours. They made up mimeographed petition forms and went about the city asking men and women to sign up for an election to put over the city-manager form of government for Des Moines. Some of them even took their Christmas holidays to visit cities that had the city-manager plan, conferring with leaders and getting materials that would help in their campaign.

Though some citizens complained that high school pupils would be better off staying at home nights doing their lessons, the students finally

wound up with more than 4500 signatures. At this stage of the game they turned the petitions over to the adult committees. Together, the students and the adults managed to get more than the 10,000 signatures needed.

High school interest was of great value, not only because of the formation of the Junior City Manager Leagues but also because other students banded together to save the Des Moines Plan. Thus the young people carried out in their groups the same kind of political campaigning that their elders were used to. Some say that they even clashed on the streets, as group met group and hotheads lost their tempers.

But rugged or not, the campaign was a real, living experience that they would not soon forget. These boys and girls in Des Moines were growing rapidly into responsible citizenship.

Organized Labor Opposes

On the Sunday afternoon when students from both camps were to debate the question of the city-manager plan at the Trades and Labor Assembly Hall, there came a mysterious cancellation of the permit to use the hall for the debate. Something about a rule, it was said, regarding controversial questions. At any rate, the boys and girls moved to another hall and completed the debating program. But at the time, just why the labor people withdrew the permit was anybody's guess.

Then one of the leading boys of the city-manager group at East High School resigned as chairman. He said, in explanation, that his father, mem-

ber of the Motion Picture Operators Union, had told him the manager plan would not be good for union labor.

In a city like Des Moines, where thousands worked in the plants and industries and where the labor unions were strong, this was serious opposition. It would be hard to combat.

Labor's opposition was serious, and it seemed to be sincere. As expressed by one of the state leaders of the American Federation of Labor, the most important objections were these:

1. The Iowa law which permitted cities to adopt the manager plan expressly stated that members of the Council should be paid not more than \$300 a year. Labor felt that no working man could afford to serve the city on that basis. It would leave the Council jobs to the leisure class, they said.

2. Civil Service in Des Moines — and 650 city employees out of 1150 were on Civil Service — would be damaged by the law if it gave the city manager the power to fire employees without cause. Labor did not approve of this.

3. The law permitted the city manager to force employees to testify in cases involving fellow workers. Labor objected to this feature, too.

These objections were real, although later experiences showed that the fears on which they were based were exaggerated. At the time, these fears seemed well-grounded; at any rate, they couldn't be brushed off.

Other arguments against the plan were cock-and-bull stories. Lots of people had been sold on the idea that the city manager would be a dictator;

that those who wanted the plan were Fascists; and that the best-known city manager was really a guy named Benito Mussolini, dictator of Rome.

So, in 1938, when it was time for an election, the supporters of the city-manager plan took a terrible beating. The combination of opposition from the City Council, the city employees, the unions, and other sincere opponents was too much. Des Moines voted a solid 7000 majority against the city-manager idea.

The Anchor Lap— and the Forties

During the ten intervening years came a war and its many demands upon the time and energy of the people. But the race was still on, though quietly run. Here and there, now and then, people tried to discuss a new government for Des Moines, but interest never got very high. That is, not until 1948.

Then things began to move again, as clubs and other organizations felt the need for a change at the city hall. Once again "city manager" became the watchword of those who wanted to correct what they called the graft, corruption, poor management, waste of money, high taxes, and lack of city planning. All of this was a repetition of the conditions of ten years before.

Again, as in 1938, the odds were against changing the form of government. The same groups, for the same reasons, were lined up firmly in opposition. The unions, the City Council, men high up in local politics, job holders, all those who would benefit by standing pat, said *No*.

The Armstrong Bill

About this time came a chance to make a compromise and to line up all the elements in Des Moines for a new plan. This came about because Representative Henry J. Armstrong presented to the State Legislature amendments to its law on city government that would meet nearly all of the objections from the labor unions. Local leaders saw quickly that here was the means of giving the city-manager plan a real boost. A newly formed Citizens Committee invited the labor groups to get behind the Armstrong amendments, push them through the Legislature, and then work together for the city-manager plan.

But it was not to be. Labor again turned down the invitation. This time the union members complained that too much of the planning had gone on without consulting them and that they would not co-operate.

Meanwhile in March, 1949, the legislative committee that was considering the Armstrong measure voted to kill it. This snuffed out all hope of getting labor's support, so the Citizens Committee was on its own, fighting for a new government under the old law. The chances of success did not seem too large.

Public Forums

At this point the schools and the Adult Education Council entered the picture, throwing open the school auditoriums for political debates and discussions. The leaders of both sides had the chance in these meetings to bring up their big guns. The meetings were well attended, and if ever a cit-

izenry was informed on a public question, it was the Des Moines populace. The campaign warmed up under the stimulus of free and open discussion, and everybody had the chance to chew over the facts offered by both sides. Ordinarily, it was a pretty friendly debate.

Whereas . . . Therefore

The Citizens Committee, during all this time, had been doing a whale of a job. Getting the signatures needed to call a special election was no small chore. But the Committee got more than 10,000 signatures. Men and women workers visited thousands of homes in the toughest winter Des Moines had seen in years. They had to fight the active opposition of labor, which stated publicly it would "make every effort to defeat the manager plan." They had to combat the opposition of the councilmen, some of whom not only were outspoken in their opposition but put many stumbling blocks before the workers as the campaign went on. There was the threat, for example, that the Council would throw out the petition for an election, claiming that the 10,000 signatures were not legal.

Then finally, on March 29, 1949, the papers heralded the proclamation of the Mayor:

Whereas, on the 16th day of March, there was filed with the city clerk a petition . . .

Now therefore, I, Heck Ross, do hereby proclaim a special election to be held in the several established pre-

cincts in the city of Des Moines, Iowa, on the 30th day of April, 1949.

The first big hurdle was surmounted. They would have an election. No matter that it had been set for a Saturday, when the workers would have more time to vote. No matter that it had been set for the final day of the Drake Relays, when thousands would go to the Stadium. The Citizens Committee was ready.

So—the Home Stretch

It was a neck-and-neck race as the two competitors came around the last turn late in April. The hard work of the League of Women Voters and their co-workers on the Citizens Committee had made that possible, for these people remembered the 7000 majority that had beaten them a decade before.

What a job they did! Just look at these activities: The campaigners published and distributed thousands of pamphlets called "Let Your City Serve You." They enlisted hundreds of helpers, not members of the League of Women Voters, in their campaign to reach every voter in the city. Four hundred men and women had rung the doorbells of more than two thirds of the homes in Des Moines. And during the last two days of the campaign, these men and women made more than 7000 telephone calls to voters, urging them to get out and vote and to bring their neighbors along with them. Lots of dinners were served late those last two nights!

A Photo Finish

While breathless contestants raced past the tape in the Stadium, everybody knew that the other race, the election, was going to be a close decision. More than 40,000 had voted. That was 10,000 more than the average vote of the four previous years. And the margin — but this time in favor of the city-manager plan — was a mere 810. This was a miracle, some thought, as they recalled the trouncing they had taken in the other campaign. But it was still too close to gloat over. There was much yet to be done.

Sportsmanship prevailed, though, as many of the opposition — including councilmen and labor leaders — voiced their determination to get behind the new plan and make it work. That was a cheering thing and a sign of future success, everyone hoped. One man, the Corporation Counsel, who had opposed the new plan, took a grain of comfort from the rightness of one of his predictions. He said, "Anyway, I was right about one thing, I predicted there would be 40,000 votes cast."

What Else Was Right?

Well, let's list a few items in the "right" column.

First, it was right that fair-minded citizens should get behind the new plan and give it a real trial. This they did on March 27, 1950, as they put into the new Council five friends of the city-manager plan, a clean sweep of the offices. The entire city was glad to see four good men (including a leader of labor) and one well-trained

woman take their places on the new Council.

Then we can say that if the people of Des Moines are smart and follow Cincinnati's example, they will take steps to see to it that a friendly Council is always kept in office to protect the gains that the new government can bring. They will look at the new government as they did at the old, asking for honesty, efficiency, and progress.

We can be sure, too, that even with good intentions on all sides, Des Moines has a long, hard pull ahead of it. Good government is never achieved on election day, but comes only as a result of steady concern for all that is good. And no plan of government is any better than the people who administer it.

This is right, also: in an election won by a majority of but 810 votes, the vote of the individual citizen was very important. Let anyone who says that his vote isn't needed be warned. *Your vote does count!* You can never be sure what majority your side will have. And even if your side can't win, a good-sized vote for it will make the other side watch its step.

And surely we can say that one failure does not mean defeat forever. Des Moines has proved that it can be done, even if it does take years in the doing.

In these days no campaign for civic improvement can get along without the participation of every group interested in good citizenship. Particularly does Des Moines owe a vote of gratitude to the women of the city, who made good government their project

for their outside activities. That debt to the women was recently acknowledged — and partly paid — when the League of Women Voters of Des Moines received The Lane Bryant Annual Award of \$1000 for their “outstanding volunteer services” in the fight for the council-manager plan.

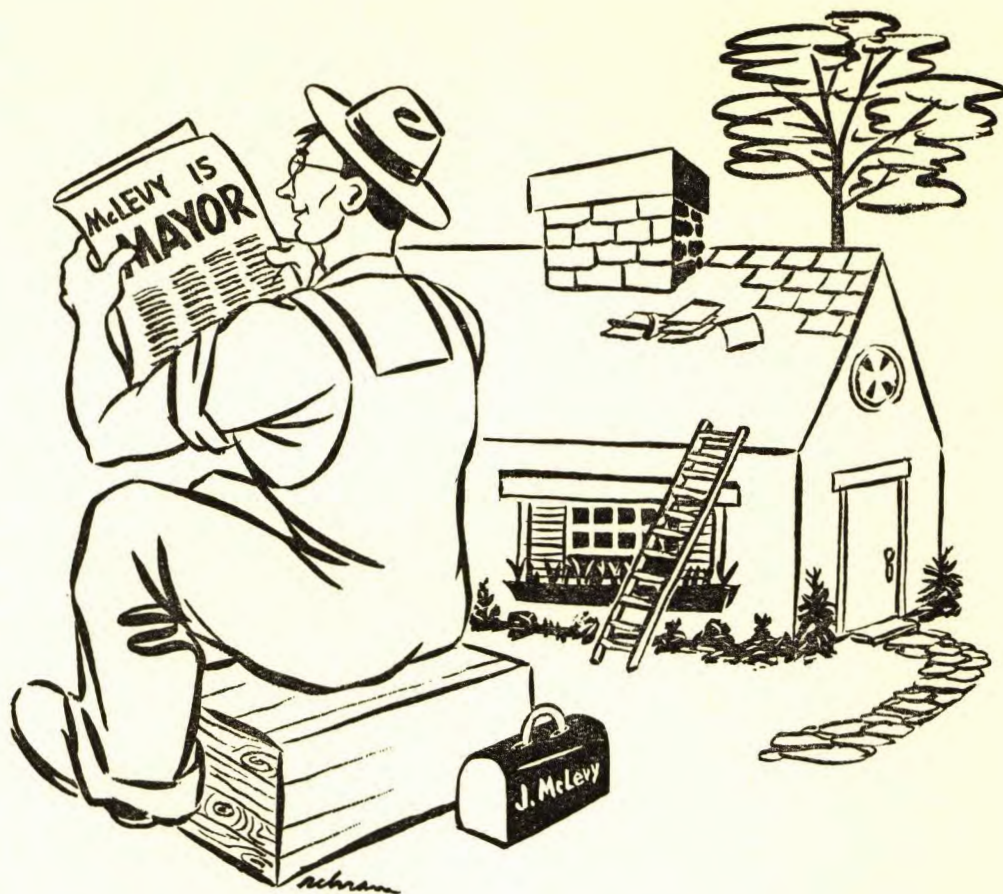
Furthermore, no community can afford to ignore the fine interest and help of the young people in the schools. Des Moines proved that; for the very boys and girls who lost their bid for fame in 1938 were old enough in 1949 to take their part in the successful fight. If there was ever an example of youth’s learning the ways of democracy in school, this is it.

It is right to say that every individual and every group in our country should have a chance to favor or oppose a change; to study and consider before deciding; to criticize and examine existing forms of city government. And to make these privileges of

greatest value, the schools are right to encourage boys and girls and teachers to take their places in the community and to support movements for better government as they see fit.

It is right to say, finally, that Des Moines during the past years has been a living example of democracy at work. Without more recent knowledge of what this new government can achieve in the next few years, we cannot predict its success, of course. So far its record has been excellent. But if it is ever challenged, we may be sure that there will be enough discussion in Des Moines to give every voter a clear view of what it has done and what it can be expected to do. The voters will know enough to vote intelligently. Everyone, down to the last house on the last street, can learn the facts if he wants to.

Des Moines is another city that has proved that it can be done, because in Des Moines, **IT HAS BEEN DONE.**



4. BRIDGEPORT -- MEASURE OF A MAN

Man on a Roof!

When a New York newspaper telephoned Bridgeport, Connecticut, to talk to Mr. Jasper McLevy, who a day earlier had been elected Mayor on his tenth try, he could not be reached. For Mr. McLevy, newly elected Mayor, was out on a job, roofing a house. Possibly he couldn't trust his own eyes and ears about the election results. After all, he had been running for city office for more than thirty years, and this was his first success. And then, with his reputation as a roofer, he wasn't the kind of fellow who would

come down off his ladder and leave the job half done. That wouldn't have been Jasper at all, according to Bridgeport folks.

You'd have a tough time finding the Mayor today, too. He still thinks that any job he's on is the most important thing in his life. In some ways, he is still the roofer. As Mayor of Bridgeport, he had been keeping a good, honest roof on the city government, which is no small job, as any mayor or city manager can tell you.

There are folks in Bridgeport who like their Mayor so much that they

tell you he should be elected for life. That may sound a little fantastic, of course. But after all, there he is, Mayor since 1933, and elected in 1949 for the ninth straight time. In that year his four opponents got a little smaller total of votes than he made himself; his total was more than 28,000.

You can see that it's going to be a little difficult to tell about Bridgeport and its city government without giving a plug for Jasper McLevy. Many writers have written his story. But people tend to forget that citizenship in Bridgeport, or in any city, is not a one-man job. Certainly the 28,000 voters who put Jasper into his ninth term could hardly be called bystanders. They wanted good government sincerely enough to abandon their own Republican or Democratic tickets to vote for a man who has always run on the Socialist ticket. How he does it is one of those amazing stories, more so because the Socialist Party in Bridgeport has fewer than 500 members enrolled.

So let's take a quick look at McLevy and his work, because he personally has made it possible for Bridgeport to be the envy of many another city. Its low and steady tax rate, small indebtedness, and wonderful city services have made it so.

In McLevy you see a man who as a youth was a great reader. Mostly he liked to read books on social or economic topics. He liked Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, for example; and Lincoln Steffens, who gave the country a glimpse of how bad city government can be, was another of his favorite

authors. Reading such books and then deciding to do something about things in his own home town have made McLevy the man he proved to be. Reading and working in politics took lots of time. For years people thought it was wasted time. After all, Jasper had been running for office a long, long time before hitting the jackpot as Mayor.

At 70 plus, this fast-stepping Mayor is old enough to retire, by most people's standards. But at the City Hall he doesn't act or look like a pensioner. The elevator operators sometimes get a little miffed because he prefers to walk up the stairs to his office. He is a fine physical specimen who, for recreation, flexes his muscles on a 60-acre farm. After plunging around Bridgeport most of each weekday morning and working at City Hall the rest of the day, he still finds time and energy to do the regular thing in politics — patronize church and club suppers around the various neighborhoods of the city. The people like to see him come to their affairs. And he says he likes the affairs, because usually you don't need to dress up for a church supper and you get the best meals there, too. At home, of an evening, McLevy carries on his habit of reading a stimulating book, and perhaps sipping a cup of tea. Pretty busy fellow!

McLevy began his working life as an honest-to-goodness slate-and-tile roofer, learning the trade from his father, who had come to this country years before from Scotland. Young Jasper liked his trade and became a first-class roofer. He loved to work,

too, a trait which he carried with him right into the City Hall. In fact, some of the boys were quite upset by his insistence that those employed by the city government either begin to work or find another place to loaf.

Some have compared McLevy to Abraham Lincoln. No doubt his habits, his thrift, his plain dress, and his sincerity – which even his enemies will admit – have suggested this comparison. There is certainly no doubt that people in Bridgeport admire him for his ability to make the most of a Bridgeport tax dollar.

One merchant tells how he was approached by a committee to give to a fund designed to get rid of that “pest” McLevy. The merchant declared that he could not give to such a fund, but if they came asking for money to keep McLevy in as Mayor for life, he would be the first to donate. That’s what many businessmen of Bridgeport think of him. Those who don’t admire some of his other qualities are quick to admit that for efficiency and honesty they find no fault with him.

Here’s Bridgeport

Some of you already know about Bridgeport. It’s a town of about 150,000 population, located on Long Island Sound. A manufacturing city, it gives employment to thousands of workers, many of whom have come from foreign countries and from many different parts of the U. S. A. Some people think of it for its great variety of manufactured goods; a few old-timers recall that P. T. Barnum, the great circus man, made his headquarters there. Lots of visitors remember its

pleasant Seaside Park and two-mile seaside boulevard. The kids in Bridgeport like to think of the city-owned amusement park, which Jasper McLevy himself visits time after time in the summer.

But we’re going to stress the government of the city of Bridgeport. This pamphlet has tried to emphasize the principle that good government is within the reach of any community. Bridgeport has the mayor-council type of government. Like all governments, it requires skillful administration and intelligent voting. For many years it did not have either, but since 1933 it has had both. That’s an unbeatable combination in city government.

For the purpose of measuring the progress made by Bridgeport, we suggest that you look back in this pamphlet for the “yardstick.” (Page 23) Use it to check this community both before the advent of the new government and since. First, let’s see what things were like before 1933.

The Old, Old Story

By now you know what some of the things are that make a city government bad. Bridgeport had about all of them. Here’s a city, for example, that in 1933 wasn’t even able to handle its own pocketbook. Treated like a child by the State of Connecticut, it had lost its right to spend its own money because for years it had been doing its business the dumb way. So when the city needed more money, it had to ask the State for permission to borrow beyond the legal limit. In return, the State said it would take charge of Bridgeport’s financial affairs, and ap-

pointed a supervising committee to do it.

What brought this on was the bad habit they had in Bridgeport's City Hall of spending more money than they took in. They were forced to borrow money even to pay wages and salaries, expenses that should have come out of current funds. They seemed not to understand that mismanagement can make a city poor. They wasted money and materials. The citizens allowed the party bosses to hire people on the basis of their political services. People watched glumly and helplessly as the city debt mounted and the tax rate went up. Most Bridgeport folks didn't seem to care that favorites were getting the jobs, the contracts, and the big orders for supplies and materials. Only the city employees and their families seemed to be aware of the fact that a 20 per cent cut in wages was imposed on the workers.

No wonder the standing debt of Bridgeport had risen in a short period to more than \$16,000,000. Residents of Bridgeport, if they thought of their city at all, were a little ashamed of it, but seemingly not enough ashamed to do anything drastic about it.

Reformers who wanted to correct conditions had had little luck; for usually a Democratic administration would be succeeded by a Republican one, or vice versa, with little change and perhaps with more taxes. All this time the roofer, Jasper McLevy, was beating his fists against the doors of the citizens, telling them that he could help. They found it hard, though, to

vote for a fellow who ran on a ticket that not only was unpopular but was thought by some to be dangerous. So McLevy waited.

McLevy's Handicaps

Now it wasn't entirely McLevy's fault that the citizens didn't make him Mayor. He had been poking around the city government for years. He watched everything. He attended Council meetings and various commission meetings. Everywhere he went he kept his nose active, sniffing out inefficiency and waste. When he discovered anything, he told the people about it. But it was no go! Starting to run for office in 1900, he was lucky to get thirty votes for the Common Council in 1905.

As a matter of fact, he had a couple of strikes against him. First, he wasn't thought to be the kind of man who runs for office. After all, people argued, the best mayors usually are lawyers or other white-collar men. Then, too, he was an active union member, and in the early days of this century, that was not considered a recommendation for a candidate for office. Some think that his biggest handicap was his party membership, because he stubbornly insisted upon running on the Socialist ticket. Little wonder that the wise guys in Bridgeport were able to frighten the people away from Jasper McLevy, who would, as they claimed, put Bridgeport in the soup.

So from 1900 until 1933, McLevy stood on the outside looking in. He was almost a joke at election time, although those who watched with sharp eyes saw that year by year he gained

more support. He actually ran for Mayor nine times before winning in 1933. In addition, he has run for Governor of the State eleven times, for the State Senate four times, for the House of Representatives four times, and for the Council three times.

Until 1933 Jasper McLevy was an "also ran." Then he clicked.

What Made Him Click?

First of all, he was persistent. For more than thirty years he kept plugging away at his theme of good government, never giving up. Next was his insistence upon his rights. He began campaigning in the days when a laboring man wasn't exactly given full rights in certain parts of the country. He did not give in. He stood his ground, campaigning right under the noses of the proud major parties. Often he ran for office for no other reason than to make opposition for the other candidates. Other factors were his drive and spirit; he became something of a prophet, proclaiming a better day and his part in it.

Finally, and this is most important, McLevy had standing in the city as an honest workman. It was nothing in his busy life to have one of the wealthy citizens call him to roof his house. McLevy usually would say, "O. K. I'll be over next week to give you an estimate." To which the customer would respond, "Don't bother, Jasper. Just come over and do the job and send me the bill." That is a strong recommendation for public office, if people would only insist upon it — absolute honesty and trustworthiness.

Then, too, he had the common touch. Dressing without regard for style, driving an old car, and getting his lunch by grabbing a sandwich in a diner somewhere made him popular with lots of people who liked to think that he was one of them.

So when 1933 rolled around and things were going from bad to worse, the people of Bridgeport were anxious to try anything to keep the city from bankruptcy. The "anything" they tried was Jasper McLevy.

Loaded for Bear

McLevy and his supporters didn't exactly waltz into office. They had a tough time of it, in fact. The Democrats, in control then, put up a nasty fight. But Jasper was ready. His years of watching and fighting had given him just the weapons he needed.

McLevy charged that the city was giving contracts and business to favored firms, without regard to cost. One of these deals was a contract for garbage collection. It was to be given to the firm that made the lowest bid, but which also must have ready a certain number of a special type of truck. Considering the fact that the information was given out to bidders only ten days before the deadline, it is easy to see why one company only was ready with the trucks. That company got the contract easily. McLevy made much of this in his public speaking. His poking around had already sent two men to prison on another deal, in which city employees were playing ball with fuel suppliers without regard to the needs of the city, but with profit to themselves.

These scandals, along with the sickening feeling people got every time they thought of their government, gave McLevy a majority in 1933. The majority in the Common Council was his own group, too, so that he had a real chance to work on city problems.

McLevy made up his mind to start off on the right foot. He had his chance on the first day, when a city car was driven up to his modest house and the chauffeur rang his doorbell. McLevy learned from the driver that this was the Mayor's car, come to take him to work.

"What's the idea of that big car, anyway?" asked the new Mayor. The driver respectfully answered that it was the custom for the Mayor to have a private car and a driver.

"Take it back to the city garage," was McLevy's response. "Report to me later today. I'll give you another job." And to this day the Mayor still drives his own car on the job.

Knowing what the people of Bridgeport wanted in government, the new Mayor made a tour of the various offices at City Hall. He caused the books of the departments to be opened to the public — something new. Letters to the Mayor — that is, business letters — are left open on his desk for reporters to read if they wish. McLevy thinks that the business of government is the business of the people.

He probed into costs of government. Insurance he found had been almost a racket. For example, a worn-out, rusty steam roller, found in a field, was insured at a very large premium, al-

though it was of value only as junk. All around he found facts to prove that previous administrations had used the city's business as a way to reward their friends. Their enemies, of course, never saw any city business.

As to appointments, the new Mayor forgot party in the search for good people. His own secretary today is a registered Democrat, a fact which apparently means little to the Mayor. The new merit system which he fought for is something that works; men and women know that in Bridgeport the best person gets the job, with no if's, and's, or but's.

A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing

Some who worry about having a Socialist Mayor in Bridgeport are reassured by knowing that he has not socialized the city at all. In fact, the people of Bridgeport do not even have a municipal water plant, but buy water from a private company. Many say that McLevy is really a Republican, though registered as a Socialist; and it is a fact that he gets most of his support from otherwise Republican voters, with a good sprinkling of Democrats. The voters who have kept McLevy on the job have not formed any large and active organization to work for that result. Bridgeport is in luck, and knows it. The city government works; and the voters realize that they can trust the leaders they have put in office.

The Big Achievements

Good people are a big factor in good government, even though good

people often have a hard time getting results under old and lumbering governmental machinery. Bridgeport doesn't prove that a good *form* of government has no importance. It proves only that McLevy and those who helped him could run the machinery they had to run.

Most of what you have just read has to do with the unusual things that Jasper McLevy has done to attract the attention of the people of Bridgeport. Here we take a further look at what this efficient government has been doing to bring Bridgeport to the top of the list in city government.

HOME RULE

The first big task, as you may recall, was to free the city from State supervision. This was important, because the officials of the State were not at all cordial to McLevy and his supporters, and he realized that a major piece of surgery had to be done to get the city back on its feet. The Mayor figured out the way in a hurry. In 1934 he ran for Governor. Now, he didn't really have a good chance to be Governor, but he was able to run a strong second. The most important thing he did by his campaign was to drag into office three state senators and two representatives from his own party.

Once seated in the Legislature, the three senators realized that they represented a balance of power between the two major parties. From that position of power, they made a deal with the Republicans: if the Republicans would promise to give financial home rule to Bridgeport, the three senators would help to form a majority to or-

ganize the Senate under Republican control. It worked. Bridgeport was freed from leading strings, and immediately the city began to work out its financial salvation.

CIVIL SERVICE

New life for the merit system meant that a man's job with the city wasn't a political football. Men were no longer to be kicked in and out of city jobs every time a new Mayor was elected. This, and the fact that the new administration began to restore the 20 per cent cuts in wages, was a big influence in keeping the city employees happy and in promoting efficiency.

A CENTRAL MAINTENANCE BUREAU

Following the approved practice of many cities, Bridgeport soon set up a unified maintenance crew, skilled in handling the many jobs that face city departments. This eliminated the old method of having a crew for each department, saved money, and helped the voters to keep an eye on contracts and jobs.

CENTRAL PURCHASING

Another good practice, now being followed by many communities, was the creation of a department to do all of the buying for the city. In this way, it is possible to take advantage of buying in large quantities; each department receives its supplies at the most favorable prices. Then, too, Bridgeport pays its bills promptly, getting the benefit of discounts, which often are quite large.

MUNICIPAL INSURANCE

Bridgeport has tackled with success

the problem of building up a self-insurance program, by which it is hoped that the city eventually will cover its own losses. This, too, is a fine step forward.

OTHER CITY SERVICES

Collection of garbage by city trucks, a city print shop which does all of the official printing jobs, the city amusement park, a city-owned airport, a local compensation system for workmen, new incinerators for refuse — all came to the city under the leadership of the new government. And all came as welcome changes to the citizens of Bridgeport, who by now would not do with less under any government — so long as that government is as honest and efficient as McLevy's.

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

Perhaps the best measure of a community's financial situation is the fact that lending institutions offer loans to the city at a low rate. Bridgeport may borrow now at 1½ per cent interest. This testifies to the success the government has had over the years. For example, Bridgeport's bonded debt went down to about \$7,000,000, from the former \$16,000,000. Back in 1938, when taxes everywhere were hard to collect, the city collectors were getting in 95 per cent of them, an astounding percentage for any period. All city projects have been done on a cash basis, pay-as-you-go. That includes miles of sewers, roads, streets, many parks and playgrounds, esplanades, and other physical improvements. The tax rate has remained almost constant through all the years of the McLevy

administrations, while many other cities of the same size have had to raise rates.

Something to Think About

Now let's sit back a minute and look at the picture. Have you spotted one weakness in Bridgeport's successful setup? Have you wondered what will happen when the expert McLevy is no longer Mayor?

Some citizens are worrying about that. They know that under their system of government they can't go out and hire a good Mayor. He has to be elected. And they have no assurance that anyone who can get votes will be a good administrator — or will even be honest! It's a big worry, and it isn't helped by the fact that McLevy wins so easily every time.

The Mayor feels the lack of competition, too. He believes that it makes for better government if there is opposition and criticism. He is right to think that. Leadership is very important and usually is developed when there is great competition. Even McLevy's own party seems to have little to offer, once he is ready to quit. It still holds to fewer than 500 members. The other parties have failed for years to put up good men for the office of Mayor, which is another weakness in the program in Bridgeport.

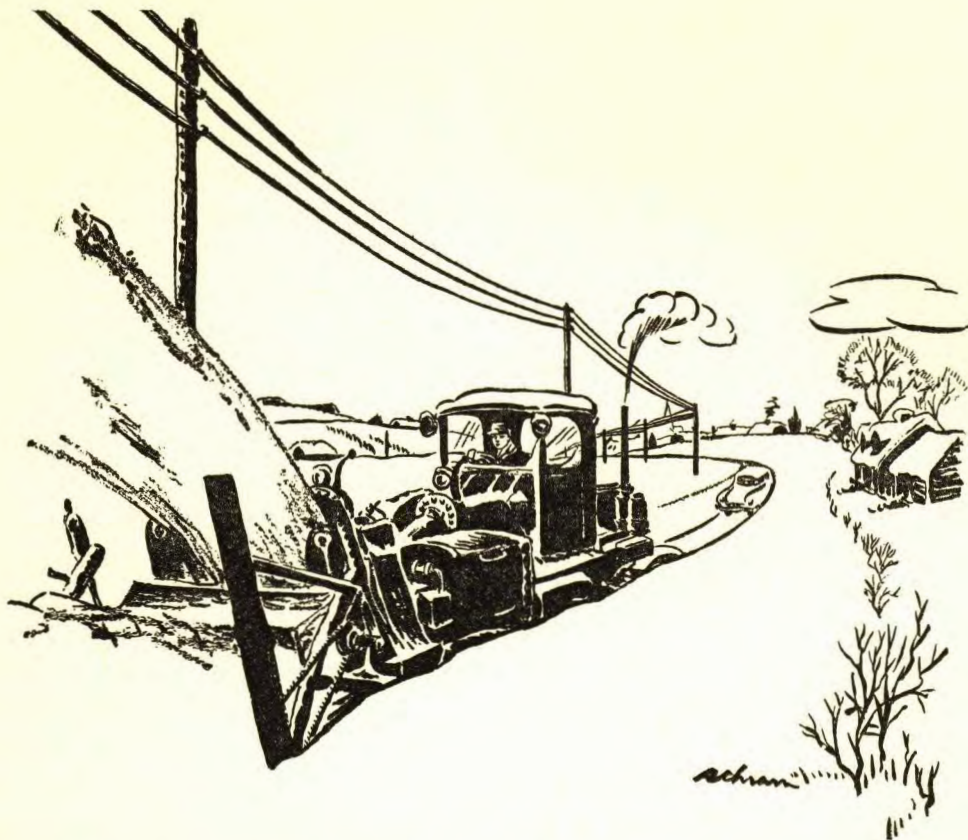
Anyone who likes to see a good thing succeed will wish for Bridgeport many more years of low-cost, efficient government. But it will be up to the people of the community to keep it so. Good political leaders are important, but they cannot get elected or operate

without smart followers who vote intelligently and back up the people they elect.

One thing the people of Bridgeport have learned, and to their credit they have stuck to it without change. They know now that party labels mean nothing when it comes to finding a good man. They realize, because of their own good luck, that men are

men, and that no party label can make them honest or crooked. This is a fine lesson for all of us, as we go on to the job of choosing those who will govern us from year to year.

Bridgeport's people — the rich, the poor, the Chamber of Commerce, the workers, the American-born, the foreign-born — have given a lesson to all the land. Measure your man!



5. WELLS, MAINE--INERTIA OVERCOME

Snow Can Be Beautiful

Snow can be beautiful, especially on Christmas cards and in the Sunday supplements. And it can also make life miserable. If you don't believe it, all you need to do is to ask somebody in Maine or Minnesota, or in any other place where snow stops traffic, pulls down telephone and power lines, and drifts up and around your windows and doors for weeks at a time. Cities and towns in the snow country have an annual problem of providing special equipment and special workers to keep traffic going and business moving. Places that have lots of snow can hardly afford to take the attitude of one eastern mayor, who is supposed to

have said, "The Lord sends the snow; we will let the Lord take it away."

People in Wells, Maine, a shore-resort town of some 2200 year-round population (much increased in the summer), have a wholesome respect for snow. Wells lies just south of Portland, along the Atlantic coast, and annually gets enough snow to make a real problem. But the trouble in Wells was that the snow problem stayed with them right on through the summer, too; because for some unknown reason the town officials seemed always to be paying for snow removal in July and August. In fact, they often had to borrow money to pay these snow-removal bills. Lots of people thought this was

a poor way to handle the town's business.

Then to add another worry, people discovered that the next town north of Wells was getting its snow removed at about half the cost per mile that they were paying. All in all, it added up to the conclusion that perhaps it wasn't the snow that caused all the trouble. Perhaps the government of the Town of Wells should share some of the blame. Furthermore, if snow removal was costing double what it should, perhaps other things that Wells was doing were overpriced, too. Citizens hate to pay double for the services their towns supply.

You may have assumed that something was rotten in Wells. This is not true, however, because people say sincerely that the men who served in the town's government were honest and well-intentioned. They say that these men did the best they could under a system which turned town business over to men who actually had plenty to do with their own affairs and could devote only part of their time to the job. Their yearly salary of \$500, plus any extra fees that they received for other services to the town, hardly repaid them for the criticism that came to them or for the responsibilities that went with the job.

Now, town government in New England is the most democratic thing we have and the oldest form of local government on the map. It comes down to us from our first settlers, and the roots of it go back to Anglo-Saxon times in England. The people get together in Town Meeting once a year

and vote on everything: schools, roads, taxes, the dog pound — and snow removal. Everybody has his say. And the whole crowd selects the men who will run things till next Town Meeting — so they are called the Selectmen. It's democracy pure and simple. It's home rule for the home owners, the local businessmen, the neighboring farmers, and the loafers at the railroad station. It's grass-roots government; and where local problems remain rather simple, it works.

But even Town Meetings can be helped by the advice and leadership of a full-time expert on town problems. Selectmen who work at town business in their spare time may let questions go over to the next Town Meeting and even then have no answers to suggest. Sometimes they haven't had much chance to get at the facts in the case. Should the town put in a new water supply? That may take a lot of figuring. The Town Meeting should be told all about it. Perhaps the Selectmen haven't time to dig down to the bottom of the matter and come up with a clear account of the need, the costs, and the best way to raise the money.

It was more or less like this in Wells.

With all respect to the men who had served them so long, the townspeople there came to the realization that the town was, to quote one of the citizens, "slightly stagnant."

Snow removal was just one of the things that bothered them. Other matters were looked into, as well. The telephone bills for the Town Hall were found to be extremely high, not because anyone was stealing or cheating

but because of looseness about controlling long-distance calls. Some people thought a three-cent stamp might well do the job that a 75-cent telephone call was performing. A small community looks twice at a telephone bill that goes above \$500 annually.

People felt also that the busy Selectmen were a little hazy on bookkeeping; though they kept lots of books, they didn't gain from their work the kind of facts and figures the town needed. The town budget was prepared after receiving from 70 to 80 requests for money; but when it came time to spend the money, it looked as if the Budget Committee had wasted its time, because spending was not carefully supervised. It was said that important pauper records, road records, town laws, and even correspondence records were poorly kept.

There were other things, too, that people found out when they began to look around. Some said that insurance on town property and equipment was not bought on a money-saving basis. And the Fire Department was thought to be spending unwisely and certainly without proper supervision.

The New Idea: A Town Manager

Then a new idea began to be talked up — the idea of a town manager. The men and women who had begun to talk "town manager" believed that, by putting the work of the town into the hands of a capable executive, they would be taking a forward step and ironing out many of the wrinkles that bothered people.

There was no question about the financial condition of the town. While

it had a debt of about \$113,000, nobody mentioned the word *bankruptcy*. There was no threat of wide-open scandal in Wells, either. The main trouble was that for a community that handled more than \$300,000 a year, the government was being run like an old-fashioned country store.

The big drive was for a trained executive on full time. A hundred Maine towns had already taken the step, so the town-manager plan was not an untried novelty. And it did not mean giving up the Town Meeting.

The drive was not highly organized, although one neighborhood group — known as "Wells-by-the-Sea Improvement Association" — did take a real stand for a change in government. Mostly the support came from men and women who quietly dropped a dollar or so into the expense fund and who promised that, while they would not want to offend the present Selectmen, they would vote in favor of a change if they ever had the opportunity.

The Big Push

A group was established under the name of "The Citizens Committee" and started to do some pushing. They asked the Town Meeting to appoint a committee to study the matter of an improved government. After appointment, the committee was slow in moving, mainly because it was a mixed group; some wanted to change, some did not, and some didn't care much. It dragged along until one of the young businessmen on the committee demanded that action be taken.

This the committee agreed to. The

Selectmen were asked to call a special Town Meeting, and the stage was set for a formal presentation of the town-manager plan to the citizens of Wells.

The meeting was held on December 16, 1948. It was attended by about 600 citizens, who came to conduct the town's business and to decide what should be done about adopting the proposed plan.

There was debate — plenty of it. When it was time to present a motion, a half a dozen of the friends of the new plan were on their feet, bidding for recognition by the Moderator. One of them was recognized. The motion was made. And the fight was on. Luckily some one had thoughtfully moved to keep speeches down to a five-minute limit, for many were there who would have talked the manager plan to death, if they could.

The old arguments against the plan were dragged out. Some thought they would be losing the right to run the town through the Town Meeting. They said that a town manager would be a dictator, robbing the people of their rights. Others claimed that the plan originated in Europe and was not American. Some people pointed a finger at the leaders for the new plan, accusing them of hatching a "Communist plot." And to cap it all, because some of the men who had headed the drive had not lived in Wells very long — not more than five or six years — they were dismissed as "foreigners" — another old method of fighting an idea with prejudice.

The leaders for the plan answered every attack with reasons why the

scheme would succeed. They pointed out that the manager could do much more than three part-time, inexperienced men. They showed that a new Board of Selectmen, serving for only a dollar a year, would be able to make the policies for the town and supervise the manager as he directed the town's operations. They showed that their town, which had a budget as big as that of Brunswick, Maine, six times the size of Wells, certainly needed a manager. No business, they pointed out, could handle so much money as that without having a trained man in charge.

Finally came the vote. Because of the provision for a secret ballot, the people who otherwise were too timid to come out openly against the anti-town-manager Selectmen were able to vote their convictions. The manager plan was adopted by a big majority.

One Year with a Manager

The same Town Meeting that voted to change over to the manager plan of government also authorized the appointment of a committee to find the man for the job. Many who learn of the growth of the manager idea in Maine wonder how it is possible for places as small as Wells, and even much smaller, to afford the salary that an efficient manager commands. This had been thought through very carefully by the Wells leaders, and they came up with the answer that is standard for Maine. By combining jobs under one head — that is, by paying the manager the wages formerly paid the Selectmen for their part-time work, plus the fees of the Tax Col-

lector, plus the extra pay given for the jobs of Road Commissioner and Overseer of the Poor — they were able to offer a very decent salary to the man they finally selected, Mr. Ernest C. Marriner, Jr. Even so, his salary was not so high as the total paid out for the various officials under the old plan.

But the saving in salaries was not the big item at all in the minds of the people of Wells. The changes that came from efficient management were what rang the bell for them. Let's look at some of the things that Mr. Marriner was able to accomplish in his first year. We mustn't forget that he had the help of a good Board of Selectmen chosen under the new plan.

Taxes. This important matter is always first in the minds of those who want cheaper government. The new manager and the capable Selectmen were able in one year to reduce the tax per thousand dollars of valuation by seven dollars.

Debt. In one year reduced to \$75,000 from \$113,000.

Equipment. The new government has made a policy of laying money aside regularly for replacement of town machinery, tools, and equipment. This is important, of course, because it means that when the town needs a new machine, the money will be ready for it.

Relief. One of the weakest spots in the old government was the handling of relief for those who were classified as poor people. In one year the expenditures in this department were reduced by 25 per cent! This was not

done by cutting down on the allotments given to the people in real need, but by finding the chiselers and taking them off the lists; by using surplus foods for distribution; by insisting on formal applications instead of offhand agreements to help; and in general by keeping the relief to the poor within the law.

Telephone Bills. Telephone bills for the Town of Wells dropped mightily during the first year's service of the new manager. He accomplished this saving by putting an invisible "padlock" on the town's telephone; by returning long-distance calls to other points on the "collect" system; and by cutting down on extra calls that could be handled just as well by mail.

Insurance. The insurance matter was attacked with the same skill. The new manager had rating authorities come into Wells to check over the public buildings for insurance rates. More than two thirds of the rates were reduced by this means. This method is being used on all of the various insurance policies, and this sort of thing brings results.

Purchasing. Purchasing of materials for town use, usually done in most smaller places on a very informal basis, is now being done with care. Large items are purchased on bids; best prices are looked for; discounts are taken. In every way, the new government is trying to run the town's business as a business. This applies to the relationship with the public schools. Although the schools and the town government are independent of each other, the new manager has been

able to be of help to the public schools in matters relating to finance and to purchasing.

Some may say that this is a wonderful achievement for a new manager. That is not the whole story. It is better to say that the town itself is to be congratulated upon finding a better method to run its business. It is better to say that unselfish Selectmen, working for a token one dollar a year, are doing well their job of establishing town policies, and that they have wisely given over to the manager the jobs that he can do best. When a town tosses away its fondness for the old just because it is old, then it can be said that the community is ready for better things. Wells has done this.

But the Greatest of These

Human nature is not ordinarily generous toward an opponent. There were some in Wells who thought differently about the town-manager idea — who opposed it seriously. People who have lived in a town for years and whose parents and grandparents have made it their home are likely to resent the ideas offered by “new” people. You can’t expect old-timers to run out into the street to shake hands with the newcomers who have been able to put over a novel idea.

But this miracle has happened in

Wells. Within the year of achievement, the big men of the old regime came voluntarily to the new group to tell them that the new government had succeeded very well. These people, neighbors, of course, came without pressure of any kind. It is a tribute to Wells that within its population can be found so many people who can look a new idea in the eye, oppose it, and then admit candidly that it has succeeded.

That gives all of us new hope. If in Wells the people can throw out the old and put in the new without leaving hard feelings, then in your cities and towns, wherever this pamphlet finds you, it can be done, too. Our system, with all its bickering and debating, can get things done; and we’ll take it instead of a dictatorship, which may run ever so smoothly on the surface, but in which the life and the opinion of the individual citizen do not count.

Wells, the small town, the town with vision, has pointed the way for many another community that is still stuck in the old ruts. What has been done in Wells can be done in many a small place. It’s worth trying.

P. S. Snow-removal bills in Wells are now much reduced, and the bills are paid as they come in.

A LOOK BACKWARD

Cincinnati – Des Moines – Bridgeport – Wells. One in Ohio – another in Iowa – the third in Connecticut – and a smaller town in Maine. Not very many, not as many as we might have told about – oh, no! not nearly as many. These are only sample shots; and we admit that you could find another ten for every one of them. And always the same story, with different settings and different circumstances and maybe different answers for the same question: *How shall we get better government in Our Town?*

In one sense, the answer is bound to be the same as long as we have democracy: *It's up to you, the citizen.* If you, the present reader, are not yet a voter, it won't be long before you are. High school students can do something toward good local government,

even while they are students, as you have seen. You can certainly take the problems of local government seriously and study its principles carefully – as in our “yardstick” and in many other sources – while you are still in school. Other and more active things you can do with the help of teachers and parents. This business of good government isn't book-stuff; it's real. Just to learn how well-run your own town is – if, lucky for you, it is well-run – can be a thrill.

This pamphlet isn't fiction, to be read and forgotten. Improving local government is *not* impossible. IT HAS BEEN DONE. Maybe it is being done – now, right here, outside your very doors and windows in your own home town. Why not find out?

Living Democracy Series

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