

CLARK ACT PRAISED AND CONDEMNED BY STATE EDITORS

(Continued From First Page)

people know to whom they must look for results. There was also increased cost under the commission form, but the lack of a single directing head was recognized and the people were glad to change to the mayor form of administration.

Also in Denver the heads of the various departments are appointed by Mayor Speer, who makes most of the other appointments. Denver's experience has been the experience of many other cities that have experimented with the commission scheme of government.

It is admitted in Harrisburg that the plan has worked out here in some respects quite satisfactorily and in others it has been a distinct failure. The Telegraph has requested the views of its contemporaries in the Third Class cities of the State and those thus far received are submitted herewith.

WILKES-BARRE CONTENTED

Eugene F. Giering, editor of the Wilkes-Barre Record — "Wilkes-Barre's experience with commission government has been fairly satisfactory, eminently so in some ways. My impression is that it is a big improvement over the old councilmanic form with ward representation. Undoubtedly it has done some good things as well, but it must be borne in mind that no form of government can be perfect against lapse of interest or other delinquencies on the part of the electorate. The best we can do is to adopt the form that appears to us as being the best in principle. I can see no hope of universal improvement in changing to a council of seven or nine members, they to serve without pay and to appoint the heads of departments. The temptation to seek office for the sake of the political perquisites would induce men of low caliber to seek the office just as the political power, plus the salary, tempts men of low caliber under the present form. The suggestion that each city be given the privilege of conducting its government to suit itself should be less objectionable than another general experiment. But in Wilkes-Barre there is no demand for a change of any kind."

MEN, NOT THE FORM AT FAULT

Jess E. Long, editor and manager Daily News, McKeesport — "We find that there isn't much to complain about in the form. If good men are elected the problem will be solved. We have a mayor and four councilmen. If a combination of three is formed among them and that combination is made of men of low caliber and does not work for the best interest of the taxpayer, then the form is all wrong. In almost three years we have seen combinations come and go. Good and bad has been the result. As a whole in the experiment over the old form of dual bodies I think we are better off. If the Governor had not knocked down the proposed amendments the League of Third Class cities recommended at the last session of the Legislature, I think the commission form of government would have been greatly improved. The amendments were carefully considered by the solicitors of many Third Class cities. Much time was spent in preparing the amendments. But the Governor introduced no counter amendment. The substitution of a single council to act without pay and that body to name heads of departments might work out all right. That's new ever this we have heard of it. The greatest complaint here has not been against the form, but the men who have been elected."

FAVORS A CITY MANAGER

Harry F. Johnston, the Altoona Mirror — "The commission form of government worked well and sometimes worked ill in Altoona. It has enabled us to get some things we needed a little sooner than would have been the case under the old form, but it has not been all that was expected of it by long odds. We thought it would eliminate roll calling; it hasn't. We thought it would concentrate responsibility as well as authority; it hasn't done that either. A couple of weeks ago Mayor Charles E. Rhodes introduced an ordinance strengthening the State Blue law by increasing the fine for Sunday selling to not less than \$15 and not more than \$25, or not less than 30 days imprisonment. Some of his colleagues did not want to take a stand either way, so they amended the ordinance by referring it to a referendum of the people. One of the best things that has been accomplished under commission government is the placing of virtually all the municipal employees under civil service regulations by fixing their terms of office during efficient work and good behavior. The policemen, firemen, health bureau, water bureau and electrical bureau employees are all protected and cannot be removed, except after a public hearing of charges against them by council. This would never have been possible under the old system. Perhaps the weaknesses of commission government are not due so

much to the form as to men. It provides the machinery for an efficient and economical administration of the public's affairs, but the men who run it must be honest, able, fearless and without political ambition. As for ourselves, we favor a city manager."

HOME RULE DEMANDED

Hon. Fred. C. Kirkendall, the Wilkes-Barre Times-Leader — "I am of the opinion that no general improvement has been shown in Wilkes-Barre under the commission form of government over the old system. Responsibility is just as hard to center and taxpayers are not getting any more for their money than they did under the old. I am of the opinion that the forms of plan-government are secondary matters. That it is all up to the caliber of the men who hold the official positions. I am also heartily in favor of 'Home Rule' for cities and believe an act should be passed giving cities the right to choose their own form of government. Every city has its own problems to solve and any general classification at works hardships."

HOW IT WORKS AT EASTON

C. N. Andrews, general manager and editor, Easton Free Press — "Just what to think concerning the working of the commission form of government in Easton is a puzzling proposition. In many respects the commission has done well. In some there is not the change that was hoped for. That politics would be eradicated has not proven true here, though the course of the commissioners did not give the public that insight into the political nature of the work that was the case with the old double council organization. The people are kept in the dark to a great degree concerning the purpose of the commission, as contrasted with the old body. In the latter the discussions were in committee and in the sittings of councils. The meetings were open and reporters gave full accounts, the people thus learning the intentions, the arguments and position of the councilmen. It developed early under commission government that there was to be little open discussion. The meetings that were held were generally perfunctory; there had been private discussions, beforehand and agreements and there was little else done but to act formally on previously decided points. As to politics, in the fire department vacancy was filled by the appointment of a man whose politics, it was subsequently learned was Democratic. Most of the men engaged in highway department work, if new men were of the same political faith. When there came a change that was effected by the second election of commissioners, it was noticed that new men in the fire department were generally Republicans for the head of that department is Republican. Politics had entered into the election of the new commissioners. When the first body was elected the election was nearly nonpartisan as an election can well be.

Nonpartisan Feature Doomed

The fact that politics has entered into the work of the commissioners and into the second election leads me to think that the nonpartisan feature contemplated by the act, is doomed hereafter in Easton. The general work of the first board of commissioners was on the whole good. No old body of city councils would have dared to spend the public money in the way it was done. Unquestionably the fire department was made much better so far as equipment was concerned. Good before, it was measurably strengthened, but the cost was considerable. The highways of the city are better, the garbage department better, the police about the same, while parks and playgrounds are receiving more attention, the people approving this last development.

"Possibly commission government has not had a fair trial in Easton, because the commissioners have been trying to maintain the city, meet the increased cost, do more work without increasing the tax rate, practically keeping the expenses down to those of the old council. Some additional money has been available through a revaluation of the assessments on real estate for taxable purposes, and this money has been needed. There is not the least intimation that the commissioners have not been scrupulously honest and careful in the city finances. With the money at hand they have done well.

No Open Discussion

"There is less friction, less fault-finding, less criticism, this comes in a great part from the fact that there is not so much open discussion. The commissioners perform their work, and that is about all there is to it, though it is noticeable that they are sensitive to public criticism, and endeavor to meet it, or to profit by it. Our commissioners have been and are setting a high standard for candidates and there is a strong demand that this standard be lived up to. Experience in other cities, I understand, has achieved in that later bodies have not been considered as efficient as the first body elected.

"As to the proposition to have the law amended and a new council of seven or nine elected with power to appoint the heads of the several departments, without being familiar with all the provisions of such a plan, I would not recommend it as a purpose as well as the present law. "I think that it is too early to say that commission government for cities success. There are arguments both ways, with those of the success advocates the more numerous and stronger. It would be unwise to attempt to change the law at the coming session of the Legislature. Commission government has not been thoroughly tried out.

ALLEN TOWN IS SATISFIED

Charles W. Weiser, editor Allentown Democrat and Evening Item — "The commission form of government is working out very satisfactorily in Allentown. I am of the opinion that the voters of Allentown would not favor a proposition to abandon the system if called upon to decide the question in their ballots. I attribute the success of the system in Allentown to the fact that the members of our council work in harmony. In other words, there is teamwork. Each councilman does his entire time to the department or departments to which he has been assigned. He is responsible to his colleagues for the conditions in his department. Every councilman is at his office at 7:30 a. m. and remains on duty until 4:30 p. m. Regular meetings of the council are held when there is a free expression of opinion, but there is no attempt made to 'butt in,' if I may use a slang phrase, on the business of each other. This plan has been working most satisfactorily and I do not believe there is a Third Class city in the State the government of which is conducted in a more business-like manner.

"If commission form of government has failed in some cities I do not believe it to be the fault of the system, but of the voters, who failed to elect the right sort of councilmen. It is folly to assume that commission form of government is a panacea for all municipal ills. It is merely a means to an end, and that end can be attained if the voters, the stockholders in the municipal corporation, use the same fine discrimination that the stockholders of a private corporation use when they elect their directors. "So far as the proposition to amend the Clark bill by inserting an optional clause is concerned, I believe the idea is in accordance with the home-rule principle and is any city in the State that does not wish to have commission form of government its wish should be granted.

CHESTER AGAINST CHANGE

Senator Wm. C. Sproul, of the Chester Times — "We are very well satisfied here with the commission form of government, although it is a bit more expensive than it needs be. I believe that possibly the substitution of a small council might be more desirable, although we really feel opposed to any more fooling or tinkering with our municipal government. We have had a good many changes in the past few years and just about the time we get used to one system some fellow comes along with a proposition for a change.

STRONG FOR PRESENT FORM

William McCormick, editor and proprietor, the Reading Herald — "I would consider an abandonment of commission government a very regrettable step backward both for Reading and for the State. "I believe that the passage of the Clark bill establishing commission form is one of the best works that a Pennsylvania legislature has ever achieved. Reading's first experience under a commission form of government was a very satisfactory one. "The five men chosen for the first two years were of a higher type than had ornamented our city council chambers in many years. There had occasionally been one or more first class councilmen. The general type was mediocre. The people didn't seem to desire or expect anything but mediocrity of personnel. Hence there was only mediocrity of performance and sometimes what was worse than mediocrity. A very superior type of councilman was chosen under the Clark law. As a result there was more aggressive and resultful work done during the first two years of commission government than has been done through many preceding years. "Reading has done much since the early part of 1914 which it never contemplated doing under the old form of government. The second election under the commission form was of a different sort. Only one of the old council members was re-elected. Certain of his four associates are of a reactionary type. But they have been unable thus far to do anything disastrous. They are safeguarded and limited in a way which would not have been possible under the old council form. "I regard the demand for repeal, to which you refer, as a reactionary demand. I don't believe that any patriotic, far-seeing, unselfish nonpartisan citizens here have taken in this demand. Of if they do, I think they are much mistaken, and will presently realize their mistake.

"If called to my advantage in the plan which you suggest, and even if there were imaginary advantages, I think the Clark form of government has been given too brief a test. I think the time is ripe for a change. The optional clause does not appeal to me. I believe the cities of the Third Class ought to be governed uniformly. I believe the concentrated wisdom of citizens of a Third Class city is superior to that of individual segregated towns.

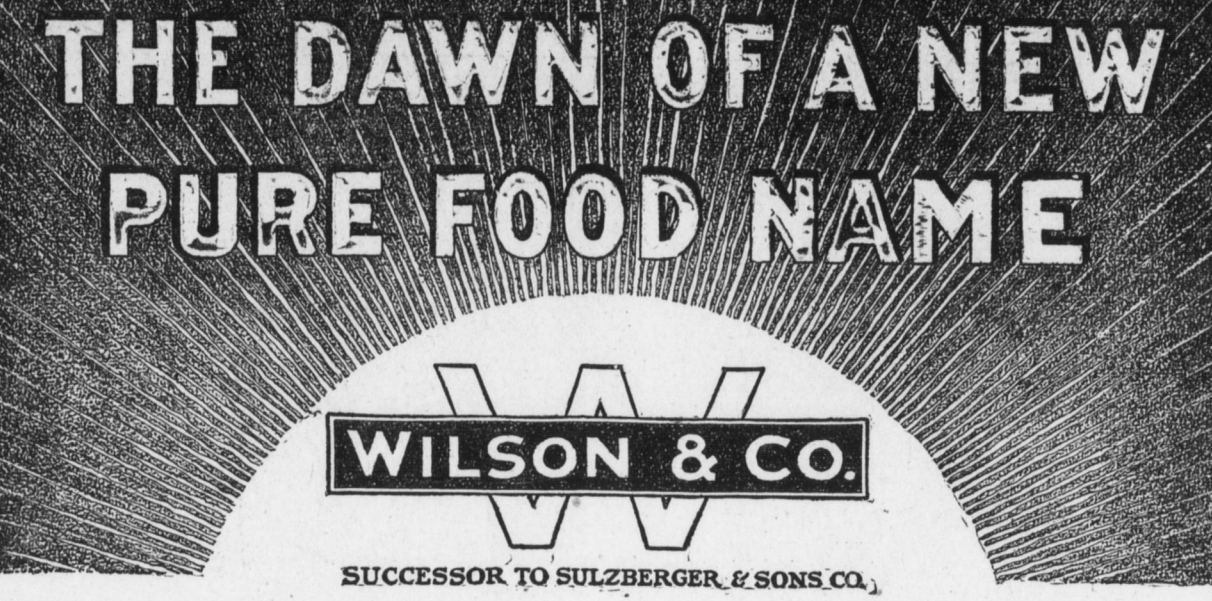
It is true that a town as big as Reading, with 110,000 people, may have real problems from a town of 20,000, and yet both are at present counted Third Class cities. "There may be errors of classification, but the optional clause would allow too much autonomy. The political views of certain cities would have to be considered in their own way. They could adopt a form of government that suited themselves. I believe the composite plan, to which the men of the Third Class have contributed their experience and their good sense, is the proper form, and that the law passed by the Legislature should be mandatory and inclusive.

A BAS THE CLARK ACT!

W. H. Schwartz, editor the Altoona Tribune — "I have never believed in the possibility of providing by a general law for the necessities of the cities lumped together under the act dividing our cities into three classes. If I had my way I would provide for home rule for third class cities. I am, therefore, opposed to the Clark act, a retrogression instead of an advance, imposing upon the people a wholly needless burden and producing nothing in the way of increased efficiency as compensation. I have not yet reached that stage of advancement in which I am willing to trade with satisfaction the denatured Mayor of the Clark act, under it the Mayor is 'neither fish, flesh nor good red herring.' I believe there should be a distinction between the legislative and the executive branches of the municipal government. A bas the Clark act!"

WILLIAMSPORT HAS ENOUGH

George E. Graft, editor and publisher, the Williamsport Sun — "As the result of our observation of the practical workings of the commission government has not been thoroughly tried out. "We strongly recommend the single council of five or more members,



A personal statement by Thomas E. Wilson

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fact that the commissioners elected have been keeping their eyes on a reelection and have side-stepped duties that, while obviously necessary, have involved features that might react unfavorably upon the political fortunes of the commissioners. "I am firmly convinced that commission government, provided right men are elected, is a vast improvement over the bicameral system. But, unfortunately, our people cannot be induced to recognize the importance of selecting the right kind of men. The basis of selection is apt to be Church affiliation, or fraternal association, or some other immaterial and frequently destructive influence that is subversive of the best development of any form of government. "It is probable that were the matter submitted to Altoona voters they would recall commission government since there is quite a widespread belief that it has been a failure. There is warrant for this opinion, if we do not differentiate between the system and those who control it. "Personally, I favor the city manager plan with, perhaps, an advisory board selected by the voters and serving without pay or for a nominal salary. Elective heads, responsible directly to the people, are not, in my opinion, the most desirable arrangement."

LAMENTABLE FAILURE AT YORK

W. L. Taylor, head of the York Dispatch and York Daily — "So far as making many of the improvements that were promised the commission form of government has proven a definite and lamentable failure in York. The hand of political intrigue is more evident and expensive than ever before, both in the transaction of public business and results obtained. Expensive political bickering has cost us much money. I have no doubt whatever that if given the opportunity of voting upon the subject York would, by a large majority, return to the old form of government rather than to continue with the new. In my mind the ideal form of government for cities such as ours would be worked out on the basis of an unpaid council and paid manager."

CITY MANAGER FAVORED

Charles M. Kelley, general manager of the Altoona Times — "Relative to the working of the commission form of government here, we can advise you that, so far, it has failed to realize the benefits that its advocates predicted for it. We have increased our operating cost without any appreciable improvement in administration; and we have failed utterly to centralize responsibility, perhaps due to the

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