

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers*, Dec 20, 1890 to May 30, 1891)

A Business View of It

Cincinnati is governed by officers and bodies whose names, duties, and powers are prescribed by acts of the legislature of the State of Ohio. These acts are subject to such amendments, modifications and repeals as may from time to time seem best to the legislature. This, even to the extent of substituting an entirely new form of government and new sets of officers to administer it, the city is thus simply the creature of the Legislature.

It would require very elaborate research to ascertain how many different forms of government Cincinnati has thus had since its birth as a city. It is an egregious thing to have to say, but many changes have been made, not from a desire to improve its government and purify its administration or to apply to municipal government the wisdom acquired by the wider experience and broader development incident to modern advancement.

In the majority of cases the main motive has been a desire to turn over the control from one party to the other; to make a new "deal", a new definition of the petty spoils of office; to transfer the honorable occupations of public service with their emoluments, even down to street repairing, garbage removal, etc., from the faithful workers of one party to those of the opposite.

Some changes, however, have been made in order to get rid of a corrupt board of incompetent officials; some others in order to bring about special reforms, and still others to give to Cincinnati the benefit of the lessons taught by an intelligent study of the improved forms and means of municipal government and administration in the other great cities.

Recently, various public business bodies inspired by this last desire have, at great expense of time, labor and money, prepared a new municipal charter for Cincinnati. That is, a law to be passed by the State Legislature prescribing the form and manner of its government, which it is hoped will remedy many, if not all, of the evils now existing.

Yet from some accounts it would seem that it is exceedingly difficult to find a member of the legislature willing to take enough responsibility in the matter to introduce a bill for the adoption of this law.

And why is this?

Is it because legislators have lost faith in reform movements? Do they believe that whatever the new form may be, the rogues and rascals will in a short time say two years or so at the outside, once more obtain possession of the reins of municipal government

and reinstate the old evils?

There are not wanting serious reasons for the belief that it is because it is feared that its passage would end the reign of politics in our municipal affairs and their party "healers" and workers would no longer find in petty offices the reward for party services.

In a statement recently submitted to a legislative committee it is boldly charged that the fact that persons get into office both by election and appointment for partisan reasons, that the true reasons, merit and capacity, are ignored is one of the main causes of the existing conditions now pervading in the public affairs of Cincinnati, and the most detrimental hindrance in the way of all proper reform in its government and administration.

And at times it would seem that there is no possible means short of a revolution, by which we can separate the administration of municipal affairs from national politics.

Yet how utterly absurd is the present mixture of the two. The city of Cincinnati, with its waterworks, its street repairs, its improvements, its schools, workhouse, fire department, its superintendents, and its various departments, its myriad contracts, its manifold valuable business interests, is nothing more nor less than a great business corporation associated for the purpose named with power to provide for the expenses of its business by assessments in the shape of taxes upon its members.

The profits of the Corporation of Cincinnati are to be returned to its members not in money, but in good and honest administration.

Just as in our Law Library the stockholder's duty is to pay an annual assessment on his share of stock. The only return to him is the use of a well-equipped and well managed library which has been purchased by contributions thus received.

The main thing is, to secure honest, capable man to do the actual work of this Corporation, to fill its Board of Directors and to transact its business.

It is not a statesmen with pronounced views on questions that divide national political parties who are wanted. Yet we find good citizens, even members of this club, who when called upon to vote for a member of the School Board will work, vote for, and select to that office a saloon keeper who happens to be a member of the same party, as against a personal friend a member of this club, and withal a man of education, of learning and ability, of business tact and knowledge, who has been persuaded by good citizens of all parties to accept the nomination for the to him, burdensome and unwelcome office, and will defeat him – all because forsooth, he happens to be a member of the opposite political party.

And this too, in the face of the fact that by no possible combination of circumstances can national politics ever have anything to do with any question coming before the School Board or any proper influence upon or be in any way affected by its action.

The city of Cincinnati, is, as I have said, nothing more nor less than a business corporation organized under special and general acts of the legislature providing for what it may do and how it may do it – in other words – the manner in which it shall carry on its business.

The gas company and the great railroad corporations in extent of power and business, come the nearest to it.

Take the gas company. It is well-managed and its stock is a desirable investment.

Suppose for a moment – as the time for its annual election of directors approached, a mass meeting of its Republican stockholders should be convened at Turner Hall and of its Democratic stockholders at Price Hill, each for the purpose of nominating candidates from their ranks for membership in the Board of Directors.

That then, amid unlimited supplies of beer, cigars and tobacco, with glowing references to the last national party platform, with a few fights here and there among the delegations, with great hurrah and much quiet purchasing of votes candidates should be selected to serve as standard bearers for the parties in the approaching election, and then should follow a campaign in which candidates should subsidize bar rooms and should solicit and obtain votes by promises of what they would do on behalf of the voter and of the worker – provided they were successful in securing the election.

One party triumphs.

And then the successful candidates instead of retaining in their employ of the company those whose experience in its service have demonstrated them to be faithful, desirable employees, should immediately proceed to make room for their adherents and supporters by a wholesale system of removals in order to redeem their campaign pledges, and instead of devoting their time and ability to the service of the company and the best administration of its business should listen to the importunities of this, that and the other man and his friends for a place in some petty under office, not because of his fitness for the place, but as a reward for past services at the polls.

Would not a Corporation, be it city, railroad or gas company, thus managed in a very short time become hopelessly and thoroughly insolvent?

Its ruin would be do not to the form of its government nor to the fact that by the general law the election of its managers was entrusted to its stockholders, but rather to the character of its stockholders, and back of all and above all – to the reasons that controlled in the election of its officeholders.

The results will be the same so long as the same reasons continue to control the electing or appointing power. The road to genuine and permanent reform in municipal affairs can be opened and left open only by an effort to cut off from them any considerations of

national politics and to destroy thoroughly the idea that public office of any kind is to be in any way a reward for party services.

When this shall be done for our city, then and not till then may we hope for success in adopting in its behalf the better systems of municipal administration which have been developed by the progress of modern civilization.

T[hornton]. M. Hinkle

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