

Portland, Oregon,

February 16, '12.

Hon. Allen G. Rushlight,

Mayor of Portland, Ore.

My dear sir:

I believe, and think you will agree with me, that the vast majority of the people of Portland want the commission form of government adopted in lieu of the present unsatisfactory form. The question seems to have lost some of its vitality during the past few months, but nevertheless it is still an issue of vital importance and one that directly affects every citizen. It is a question that we will be called upon to solve, and now is the time to prepare for intelligent action to bring about its adoption in the proper and acceptable form.

The city of Portland is growing rapidly and has made wonderful progress during the past few years. The railroads have made extensions into territory heretofore denied adequate transportation facilities, which is contiguous to Portland. Portland will derive the largest benefit from the development of those resources which have lain dormant owing to lack of such facilities, and will be the distributive center. The completion of the Panama Canal will add to its importance as a trade and commercial center and pave the way for the establishment of new industries by reason of the revolutionary effect upon transportation. Good roads are bound to be constructed, because without them there cannot be a full development of the state's resources. In fact, Portland is destined to progress during the coming few years as it never has before and will take a new place among the cities of the Pacific Coast.

In keeping with this great material progress there should likewise be progress in civic government. I do not believe that any progressive citizen will dispute the fact that our present form of city government is irresponsible, inefficient, expensive, complicated and obsolete. There should be greater efficiency in its administration, simplicity in its procedure, economy in its conduct and an elimination of graft and politics. If commission government served no other purpose than to eliminate politics it would be well worth adopting on that ground alone. Politics are a breeder of corruption, graft, delinquency and incompetency in office and general inefficiency; tend to build up a machine and perpetuate in office officials possessing only political qualifications; foster discriminations and petty graft in awarding contracts, making purchases, etc. In fact, eliminates business methods. What we want in city government is the application of business principles in its administration, the same as in the conduct of any well organized and efficiently managed business institution. The people are taxed to support it and ought to obtain in its administration value received for every dollar expended. I am speaking now of city government in general under the aldermanic and political method. The present city administration is undoubtedly doing the best it can under the present unsatisfactory system, but when there is room for an improvement in administering the city's affairs I think there is no excuse for continuing to operate under such a system.

Under existing conditions commission government is impossible of adoption, for the reason that there is not sufficient cooperation and conciliation. There are at present four charters under consideration. What show has commission government with its forces divided into four groups? None! It would be useless and a wasteful expense to even bring the subject to a vote with this condition confronting us. There is no reason to doubt but that there is good in all the charters (and also in the present charter) and that the motives actuating those espousing each charter are sincere and honest. It has been suggested that there be a new committee appointed to go over these charters and mould them into one. I do not believe this will produce the results anticipated or desired. The ideas and principles involved are too conflicting and prejudice is too rife. The only result of following the present procedure in framing a charter would be discord and the submission of other charters than the consolidated one. For some reason there is a distrust by one group of the other and another appointive committee will result in a situation identical with that now prevailing.

I therefore believe in order that a feeling of the utmost confidence may prevail in working out this perplexing problem that an appeal should be made direct to the people and they be in a position to hold responsible for the framing of a commission form of government charter a committee or convention directly responsible to them, and simply offer the following suggestions as a solution of this question:

1 - That you recommend in a special message to the council that commission government be delayed until after the county, state and national elections, which will absorb all of the people's attention and interest, with the provision that the subject be taken up by the council immediately after the November elections. This in order that the question of commission government may be held aloof from the general political agitation that is bound to be prevalent for some time to come.

2 - That thereafter an ordinance be submitted to the people for the calling of a special election for the purpose of deciding upon the holding of an election for electing delegates to a charter convention, or members of a charter committee, as the case might be, to investigate, compile and adopt a charter for pure and unadulterated commission government based upon that form which has been most successful in the larger cities. I think it would be wise to limit the number of delegates or members to ten or fifteen. This course would be similar to the procedure followed in holding a constitutional convention to revise the state constitution.

3 - That a reasonable sum be appropriated to defray the expenses of such a committee or convention, and make it possible for the delegates or members to investigate and study commission government as it has worked out in some of the larger cities, with particular reference to the form of commission government in effect in the respective cities; that a complete record be kept, and given full publicity in one of the daily newspapers, of the expenditures made, such report to be made and given to the public when the committee or convention has completed its work; that a maximum be placed upon what the city council may authorize as an appropriation to defray such expenses. In this connection I think it would well that the appropriation be sufficient to permit of a sub-committee being appointed to investigate the effects and results

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of commission government in the larger cities where in operation and report to the general committee or convention. This is highly desirable if we are to adopt the most up-to-date form of commission government and obtain first-hand information.

4 - That it also be provided that only the charter compiled and adopted by the popularly elected committee be submitted at the election. This in view of the fact that if we are to accept the charters of independent committees through the initiative inevitable defeat will ensue. This will positively eliminate the submission of other charters and a certain defeat of commission government, and is the only way to make possible the adoption of a commission form of government charter. It will make impossible the submission of numerous charters proposed by committees appointed by the mayor and civic organizations.

By adopting this plan the people's interests will be sufficiently protected and safeguarded. They will elect the committeemen or delegates and accept or reject the charter submitted by an organization for which they are themselves directly responsible.

It seems to me that it would be well to submit this question to the people at the same time the city primaries are held and place the candidates for mayor and the city council at that time on record to assist and work toward the carrying out of such a program (providing it would be legal to submit such a question at the primary election). If adopted the committee or delegates could be elected at the same time the mayor and city councilmen are elected at the general city election, and thereafter the charter could be submitted to the people at a special election.

This plan will undoubtedly be attacked upon the grounds that it will delay the adoption of commission government and be somewhat expensive. I believe it will more nearly assure its adoption and think the question is one of sufficient importance to justify the utmost consideration, investigation and study, and that the money will be well spent, for in the end we will in my opinion have adopted the best possible form of commission government based upon the practical operation of the system in the larger cities. Again, as heretofore stated, I think it would be unwise to act upon the question until after the impending political contests are over.

Respectfully yours,

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