The Municipal League
of Philadelphia

- Samuel F. Kolb
The Municipal League.

In discussing the Municipal League of the City of Philadelphia, it will be the purpose of this paper to first show the conditions which exist to make the work of such an organization needful. To do this it will be found necessary to look briefly into some of the problems of city government and to point out in what respects our municipalities have failed in an efficient and wholesome policy of administration, and to show the province of an organization for remedying those evils. Then in a final chapter we shall be prepared to discuss the organization, past and present work, of the Municipal League.
and its future province and prospects.
In the first place, the position assigned to the American City is not altogether the proper one, and we have failed to a certain extent and to a pretty great extent, in our Municipal Governments, because of this position which has been assigned to the cities in our general system of government.

The contrast between what has been expected and what has actually been accomplished could have been no more clearly expressed than when the Mayor of Berlin, one of the best governed cities in the world, speaking of our City Governments, said: "With your standard of political education, your highly developed business capacity, and unparalleled material resources, I had pictured to myself an ins-
tenacity, a municipal activity which would be a constant source of inspiration to our European Municipalities. We should have outstripped you both as regards efficiency and economy to me the greatest anomaly in the history of modern political institutions." We might add that our "political education" and "business capacity" have exerted no great influence in our city politics because of "rigmarole" and "bureaucracy", and that there is great need of an organization to serve as the nucleus around which may cluster the forces of good against the strongholds of the professional politicians and political bosses.

Our cities have been looked upon too much as mere governmental organs
and not enough to business corporations, which in a good many important respects they really are. Municipal legislative functions have been discharged by the state legislature and not by the municipal population—those who are, or at least ought to be, primarily concerned, and in whose hands the business interests of the city rest. The fact that the state legislature are not more greatly actuated by the best of motives ought to be sufficient reason for taking the control of municipal affairs out of their hands. A great municipality ought not to allow itself to be used as a mere pawn in the game of state and national politics—only to be excoriated for partisan ends. It may be...
Necessary that the State have a certain amount of control of the government of the city, yet it should permit the development of the greatest possible amount of Municipal activity. But such has not been the policy of our State legislatures. They have tried to reduce the city to a mere agent of the general State administration. Under this system questions of a strictly Municipal policy have been determined by other than Municipal considerations.

A probable reason for this assumption of authority by the State lies in the corruption of City Councils. But this is not a just ground, nor will the City legislation meet with all that is done by Councils---special
legislation is state being unpre-
ecedented for all instances. The
principle then would seem to be not
legislation for the city by the state
but the election of a competent
city council by its citizens.
The city is an organization for the
satisfaction of local needs and should
have a capable and honest body of re-
presentation of its political population,
which should have power to deter-
mine its local policy. A
council representative of the city
alone can do this. This would
leave a comparatively small sphere
for the action of the state authority.
Again, the interweave of state
and national politics is largely respon-
sible for the rules of our American
city government.
It is our purpose to discuss at some length the province and special function of a municipal organization in a reforming character in any city, especially in relation to certain phases of the city's government.

A municipal league is concerned, ultimately, in the purification of the government of the city and in bringing about reforms for the greatest good to the greatest number. Looking to that end, how may such an organization be of service to the city?

In the first place, it is a means of educating the people in city affairs and of arousing them to a sense of their duty and obligations as citizens of a great municipality.

It is an important factor in
dealing with the foreign element of which we have such vast numbers in our large cities— in showing them their true relations to the conditions in which they are placed, and their obligations to the city for the protection of their lives and property, and how that they may secure some greater advantages by cooperating with the best interests of the city. Such an organization is probably most powerful in its influence on elections and thus shaping the several policies of the city government. For instance through a League the merits or demerits of a candidate are brought to the public notice which often results in the election of good and efficient and honest men.
And the defect of this evil and cleavages. It may also exert great influence in the putting forth of candidates by giving or refusing its support to the case may be, it does to a certain extent destroy the power of the political tree while it is at present one of the greatest hindrances to decent government, national, state & municipal.

The political tree must be destroyed by building up in individual citizens such sense of personal authority and appreciation of personal right and privilege which shall regard it as an impudent intrusion upon personal property. This the legislatures propose to do through and efficiently well accomplish. It is a shame and disgrace to the common sense and
integrity of the American people by
their will allows themselves to
be dominated by an unprincipled poli-
tician and think it is when he is
planning their ruin as the price of
his own personal advancement and
pains. If the municipal activity
occasioned by a League can show
the people the truth as it really
is, it will have justified its exis-
tence in our politics.

If the most Municipal Leagues are in
favor of civil service reform and are
pushing it to the furthest points
possible in our Municipal affairs. Then
this is done the result will be to
dissorganise if not destroy the very
existence of trouble whose power is
immense and can only be destroyed
by destroying trouble itself. If the
privilege of holding office is founded solely on merit, the power of patronage will be taken away and the bane will then be disarmed of one of his strongest weapons, for it is only through the gift of office that a single man can use bribery at great length, because the payment of money directly is so expensive as to be well nigh impracticable. As some one has well said, 'All power is the integer one, and three who serve himiphers, but when placed in his right multiply his power by ten.' Then a very proper field for the League is the de-struction of the patronage system; among the many other purposes of such an organization one of the most important is to place
to form the citizens ideas and ideals in city government. M. H. Shaw in his "Municipal Government in Great Britain" says that the reason municipal reform proceeds so slowly in the United States is, that citizens who desire to aid in the regulation of their town life, have formed no definite Municipal ideals. And truly it is a fact our citizens seem to have a very faint conception of an ideal form of city government. They have become accustomed to party control and bosses till this is all they know. There must be some power to a sure the spirit of righteousness and efficient government in our large cities. City government then, is an
organization not for the enrichment of a certain political party or any individual or collection of individuals, but to give opportunity for the broadest development and happiness and well-being of the people individually and in their corporate capacity.

The city of Philadelphia was in a great measure bailed in this and it is for this reason that in the autumn of 1892 some of the best and most conscientious citizens formed what is known as the Municipal League of Philadelphia.”

The following is an extract from the “Declaration of Principles” of the League, which shows their plans and purposes: “We believe that the highest principles of municipal self-government
in the United States will be materially promoted by the absolute separation of Municipal from State and National politics. The material prosperity of all citizens residing or having business interests in the city of Philadelphia depends, in a large measure, upon the honest and efficient conduct of its government by enlightened methods and upon business principles. Philadelphia should have the most improved system of taxes, of street paving, of lighting, of water, of drainage, of schools, of transit, and all other public necessities and conveniences. To secure these results will be the earnest and incessant aim of the Municipal League of Philadelphia. We advocate the practical extension of the highst
Principles & Civil Service Reform to all Municipal departments. The object of the League shall be to eliminate all National and State from Municipal politics, to secure the nomination and election of candidates solely on account of their honesty and fitness for the office, to see that our Municipal Government be conducted upon more partisan and strictly business principles and to encourage every wise project for adding to the comfort and convenience of our citizens and to the prosperity and development of our city.

Believing that the objects desired by the League could not be obtained by working through the primaries of the National parties they organized into a League under the for
ieving, declaration of principles.

The work of the association is accomplished by dividing the city into ward and district associations, and through these to control the nomination and election of officers, especially the election of city council members believing that councils are not composed of as good men as the people would choose to represent them if nominations were made by the people instead of by the small group of persons who control the political machinery. They believe and it seems very evident from recent developments, that with a truly efficient and honest council the city would have a richer and more judicious use of the immense sums of money now raised for city taxes,
Dealt a large revenue from franchises, which, for the most part, have been received by the city. That vehicle should be leased for stated periods, and to the highest bidder, could be saved and making lower tax rates possible, and improving not only the material welfare of the city, but its moral welfare as well. — This is true because council, in many instances, as in the gas ease, is a court of last resort. Probably the two most elegant abuses of power by the city council is seen in the moment of course, and in the Schuyler Hill Valley Water Company. Irregularity against which of the vehicle, the Municipal League took an active interest.

The former, much against the protest of the League and all good citizens.
passed the Councils last fall in the face of propositions more advantageous to the city, and since this recent discovery in connection with the Schoharie Water bill it is pretty generally believed that the Councilmen were "biased" in the same or as well in the latter.

Through the influence of the Municipal League and other like organizations many of the objectionable features of the gas lease were modified much to the advantage of the city, yet it passed carrying a good many conditions detrimental to the city's interest and on thewhole far less advantageous than that of other responsible Pennsylvania Companies. It passed another responsible company offered to fill all conditions if
The lease and pay ten million dollars to the city. A minority report called attention to the fact that two other companies had offered to accept all the obligations of the lease under more favorable conditions to the city. But the majority report went through with a rate of seventy-eight to fifty-two and next day passed select council by a large majority. The Municipal League still hoped but addressed Mayor, Norwalk, the following letter: "The audacity of these gentlemen in expecting you to admit that you are incompetent to perform the duties for which you are elected could hardly have been greater if they had imagined that you are a man whose honor and self-respect..."
Could be bought and sold in a public market. The consumption of the proposed lease would be a confession to all the world that the grocer must of this city which you have so often and so eloquently praised is so lacking in honesty and intelligence that it cannot manage its own affairs. In spite of this cannot protest the Mayor signed the lease and the United Gas Improvement Company has control of one of the most profitable franchises in the life of the city. This is not evidence of the failure of public management, but rather of the power of aggregated capital in politics.

An opposition to this lease was not only the Municipal League of the city
that many of its best citizens besides other organizations for local government in the city. An enthusiastic town meeting, in opposition to leasing, was held in Academy of Music under the auspices of the Citizens Municipal Association. They not only opposed the lease under consideration but declared that the best judgment and popular sentiment of the city was in favor of keeping with the public franchises and leasing the Gas Works to private corporations. They also said the League said in substance if this lease is consummated it will clearly indicate that in the great country of freedom we have renounced our right to self
government and are compelled, for self protection from political
spoilsmen of our own meeting, to
place our great Municipal Interests
in the hands of a financial oligar
chy whose sole object is to make
enormous dividends out of a plant
belonging to the people. The dis
approval of the people is shown by
the fact that when the final vote
was taken the galleries hissed their
representatives. In this meet
ning referred to above, Hon. Wayne Mc
Veagh said, "I am unalterably op
posed to the clause, though I am
a stockholder in the company and
would be immediately concerned."
He admitted that the United Gas
Improvement Company was a corpo
ration admirably managed and if
at any time the real owners of the Philadelphia gas works decided to sell or lease and offered them at open, public, fair competition to the United Gas Improvement Company. Would it be highest bidder and let them? But he adds: "I am unalterably opposed to any laying selling them. I believe they should hang on to them." He went on to find a good many plausible reasons for his beliefs, which it is not in the scope of this paper to repeat. He closed by saying that any councilman who refused to take the voice of the people on this question, and thus delivers their property over, will answer to his dying day this legend grown in his form: "Neck
Man was bribed by the rich to rob the poor. As soon went so far as to predict that the lease would not be made as the voice of the people would be heard, but in less than a month the bill became a law.

A single other instance will be sufficient to show to what extent bribing may be practiced in the councils and the pressing need of organized effort against it in our city politics. The recent los coroners in regard to the Schuykill Valley Company's Water bill, too well known to be reported here. Suffice it to say that the only man in the city in favor of it was the member of the Council who supported it. Mayor Warwick himself said if 'I will...
Certainly into the Schuylkill Valley Water Company's bill if it passed.

It is incomprehensible to one how those persons were to protect the interests of the city of Philadelphia can vote for such a measure. One Councilman, indeed, admitted of having received five-thousand dollars for reporting well favorably on the bill. While among the "five-thousands" it is not at all improbable that the bill would have passed, had it not come for the anomaly of a man in the City Councils.

It is worthy of note that Mr. Cunningham, who made the open charge of bribery in a thirty-second Ward, is a thirty-second Ward Man—a word where the Municipal League is especially active, also.
that the motion to have an investi-
gation came from a thirty-
second ward man is an addi-
tional credit mark to that portion
of the city and to the work of the
Municipal League. The League
has shown its activity in the
provision of eminent counsel to
assist in the prosecution of the
alleged bribery case in connection
with the proposed Dept of the War
Works in the City. Councilman
Wagner MacVeagh & Clinton Rogers
Montague represent the Municipal
League in this prosecution.
These instances show the con-
scientious spirit of the Council of the
City of Philadelphia and its limited
stand the position and influence
of the ward and other similar agen-
cies.
The Municipal Reform must naturally and necessarily develop into a permanent Municipal party. It is evidently appropriate to point where it will embrace all the forces of the city that foresee to act and govern the political action and secure it by following sound principles. They should be able to put a full ticket in the field — for mayor and all other elective officers. The time seems to have come when some such party is absolutely necessary in Philadelphia politics. The City Council may if it can but prostitute the whole administration in the interest of party politics, it may not only determine the policy to be followed by the
city, and make use of its large
powers for purely selfish purposes.
It is clear that the corrupt and
vicious politicians are constantly striving
to secure the legislative and judi-
cial positions which are needed
and intended for their own pecuniary
and control, and to use them solely
for their own mercenary interests.
And it is remarkable how far they
have been allowed to proceed.
Our people have been so pressed
in their own affairs that they
have not realized that their
business interests are menaced
daily by the maladministration
of public affairs. The two great
enemies to good government are in-
difference and ignorance.
by the Seafal_ttices in its purpo
to the benefice of the city council by the election of honest and capable men as a large part of the voters for righteous city government. It will have been worse. It is the business of theangkan to call attention to such needed reforms to show the citizen what they ought to have and how to put it, and to show them what they ought not to have and how to set aside it.

It is not the use of the idle and degraded that prevents the highest development of the city's interests. It is the selfishness and indifference of the better classes who neglect their social obligations and are faithless to the institutions whose beneficent shelter has furnished the comfortable
Challenges for their commercial advancement. When the influence of the citizenship of the municipality is brought to bear upon those in authority and every case of neglect of duty, bribery, and intimidation pushed to its foremost point in the law, then it is that the city will enter upon a new era of moral and material prosperity. In a large city, every individual cannot do as he pleases but must yield a certain part of his rights to the welfare of the whole, which makes it necessary that a rather severe and rigid discipline be observed. But with our police in league with a corrupt city council it is impossible that justice should always be done. It is the business...
of the city to bear closely upon its sanitary conditions - such as compulsory vaccination, the prevention of contagious diseases, etc. The slums of the city and tenements should receive not a little attention. The tenement problem is serious not only because it concerns the welfare of those whose circumstances compel them to live in crowded areas, but because the influences of disease and immorality resulting from improper city housing, affects all the inhabitants of the city. It is here that infectious diseases have their origin. It is here that pauperism, ignorance, cruelty, intemperance, and crime are daily placing their stamp...
upon the lines and character of the
inhabitants are ultimately upon the city.
Parks and playgrounds should be provided.
The city should see that a good and
efficient system of public schools is
maintained—museums and li-
braries established, and every op-
portunity given for the education
and highest moral development of
its inhabitants. It should look to
the care of the streets—paving and
cleaning, lighting. The water
supply and sewage should be care-
fully attended to. As to Curative
and Reformatory institutions such
as asylums, hospitals for insane,
drug, drunk, and habitual prisoners
and reformatories—all these de-
mand their fostering care. But
from the recent revolutions in
The City Council. What could be expected from them along this line? There are no park corporations or other bodies to demand their duty. Here is where the Municipal League is doing its work. They call attention to these needs of the city and the Councils have not always been able to supply them. They have shown that there is no need to give up our rights to a street railway, gas, or water supply company and pay high rates for service that the city can supply better and at a lower cost.

The Municipal League besides important reforms gives breadth of view of the duties of citizenship—through its work and discussion.
organization. It affords every public-spirited citizen an opportunity to make his influence felt and to contribute his share to the formation of a sound public sentiment that will be intolerant of any form of political wrongdoing, and which, on the other hand, will cooperate with every movement inaugurated in the city's behalf.

The work of the League will usher in a new era for Philadelphia politics. Through all low and treacherous march it must at last be agreed that a man cannot not be a Christian and remain a liar or a thief. The Municipal League has set for us a higher standard.
in city politics. We are approaching the time when he will no longer be considered honest and respectable who pursues the schemes for public office of one less of means. He will no longer be a good Christian who mortgages his conscience in consideration of preferment. It will not be held compatible with Christian character to shirk public responsibility. No sign will the citizen think the deposit of his ballot must be an act of considerations duty a state that a man has no right to vote as a mere matter of discretion duty on any question. As right to add
except as a patriotic duty looking to the welfare, safety, and security of this city or state. It tells him that loyalty to party ceases at the threshold of city politics; that political life ought to be, and it is his duty to help it to be, free and clean and pure. It tells him that the ballot is the base and corner stone upon which the superstructure of a perfect municipal system should be upheld, and upon which the perpetuity of our free institutions shall securely rest. It helps him to look forward to the time when the “official echo” reign in the Municipal palace of Philadelphia shall
To come worthy of so reputable a dwelling and of the city where the Declaration of Independence and the Federal Constitution first saw the light.

We very well know in the large cities in this commonwealth, and especially Philadelphia, the Councils have greater power than in almost any other city, it is sufficient to stir up in the individual citizen a strong desire to return to their Municipal Councils the very best of men. There is certainly a sufficient number of public spirited citizens in Philadelphia, if organizers to overthrow the present tyrannical regime to take the city government out of
the hands of demagogues, thieves, and shifty politicians, and institute a wholesome and efficient system of government by honest and conscientious men. But this can be done only through organization. By organization the small minority who want bad government have captured and debauched the city and made grand and crime passports to power and wealth. It is through organization that an intelligent majority can obtain good government and protect their own moral and material interests from the foul pollution of organized peculiarity. To this end the Municipal
League invites the help and cooperation of every good citizen of Philadelphia, looking to a permanent relief from the numerous municipal ills which the city now suffers. Looking to a day when good citizenship will be compelled to assert itself and will make its influence felt in the city whose very foundation was built on the ideas of justice and the common benefit.
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