

THE SHERIDAN ROAD NEWS-LETTER.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

Good Reasons Why the Pending Measure Should Be Adopted—Would Benefit Whole State—Chicago in Great Need of It.

Every voter in Illinois should know that an amendment to the state constitution is pending. It is the duty of every voter to vote on every constitutional question submitted to the electors by the general assembly. This proposed amendment is unusual in that it applies only to one city in the state—Chicago. It is in reality an enabling act. If ratified it will lift certain constitutional restrictions from the legislature and enable that body to provide a special charter for the great city on the lake.

Chicago needs a new charter which will give the city broader powers in conducting its local government. Ever since the cities and villages act, provided by the constitution of 1870 went into effect Chicago has felt that the provisions of that act were too restrictive. The rapid growth of the city, its cosmopolitan character, its widely varied interests, and the problems in municipal government which these create have for years been a serious embarrassment. These restrictions have not been felt in other cities in the state, or, at least, they have not had any serious effect, but with Chicago the harm has been constantly increasing until the situation is almost critical.

Perhaps the most important feature of the constitution of 1870 is its prohibition upon all kinds of special legislation. There had been prior to that year a great deal of special legislation, much of which had been regarded as an abuse of the power of the legislature. This power the new constitution took away. It is now sought by the pending amendment to bestow that power upon the legislature to the limited extent of giving Chicago a charter adequate to its peculiar conditions and needs.

The necessity for such a special charter for that city is not a matter of speculation. It is not a recent demand. It is not advocated by any one party, or class, or interest. The people and the press of the city are united in the movement.

The movement is not new. Many efforts have been made in the same direction. More than a quarter of a century ago efforts were being made to get rid of the evils of township government in the city. It was found that this was impossible without abolishing the system in the whole of Cook county. To this the residents of the county outside of the city would not submit. They were satisfied with the operation of their local township governments, and the legislature would not deprive them of it. Chicago in its growth has spread over eight or nine townships. These town governments were superfluous and became notoriously corrupt as political rings. It was pretty largely the same with the justices of the peace and constables. This system of minor courts has been proven an excellent one in country districts and towns and villages. In Chicago it has proven a source of corruption and oppression, especially upon poorer litigants, which is the class that suffers most at its hands. Yet Chicago could do nothing to free herself from the system because the constitution is mandatory as to its application over the whole county. The oppression has resulted largely from the uniform jurisdiction of

these minor courts over the whole county. Suits are brought against residents of the city and taken before justices in remote parts of the county and set for unreasonable hours. When the defendants appear the cases are continued, the object being to worry the defendants until they fail to appear, when judgments are obtained by default. This is going on constantly on a very large scale. Poor people are the main sufferers. Those of the foreign nationalities suffer the worst, and their ideas of American justice are poisoned thereby.

Under the amendment and new charter it is hoped to reform this abuse.

Then there are many taxing boards of the city. These are really governments within the government. Besides city, county and state there are seven townships wholly within the city, five park boards, school, library, sanitary district—all with tax levying powers—to the confusion not only of the levying of taxes, but to the economical and effective application of the revenues. Consolidation and simplification have long been demanded, and no one disputes that by such change of system the city would be greatly benefited.

It is not asserted that mere change of governmental system will do everything for Chicago. Able administration, the election by the people of honest officials, are indispensable, but under such a cumbersome and inadequate system as Chicago has at present there must be a minimum of results for the revenues raised and expended irrespective of the quality of the administration. The evils which it is aimed to eradicate under the proposed amendment and the new charter that will follow are of the kind that can not be wiped out in any other way.

The amendment itself changes no existing law. It does not empower the legislature to change any law for any part of the state outside of the city limits of Chicago. It can not change any law applying to that city to the detriment of the rest of the state. Under the provisions of the amendment the legislature can change the revenue system in Chicago as it applies to raising funds for corporate purposes, but it can not affect the state taxes. Chicago can not evade paying

the same proportion of the state taxes as she pays now, nor is the movement intended to increase taxation in that city. It is expected to get better results from the revenues raised, and to make Chicago a cleaner, better governed, and a more up-to-date metropolis. The amendment requires a majority of all the votes cast at the November election. Every voter in the state should mark his special ballot in favor of this proposition.

"UNCLE JOE" ON THE PENDING CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

Speaker Cannon is among those who are telling the voters throughout the state to vote for the pending constitutional amendment. He has been in Chicago and knows what a vast deal of room for improvement there is in that city. He says that if the amendment can do anything to improve conditions there (and he thinks it can) the voters of the state would simply be incurring the wrath of God to cast their ballots against the measure. A great many of "Uncle Joe's" hearers are likely to take his word for it and not ask for any further instruction or information.

AN ADMIRABLE CONSTITUTION

Some of the Provisions, and Their Supporters—The Pending Amendment Advisable.

The effort which Chicago is making to secure an amendment to the constitution in order to get a new charter has created a little discussion as to the general adequacy of the present constitution. It has been in force thirty-four years, and five amendments to it have been adopted. The instrument has in fact been regarded by constitutional authorities as one of the best of any state in the Union. Since its adoption it has been copied very largely in the constitutions of the newer states. Colorado took it as a model. Some of its provisions have been complained of, notably those for minority representation and the restriction on special legislative acts. The chief advocate of the former was Joseph Medill, and of the latter W. F. Coolbaugh, both of Chicago. They are well remembered as two of the most able and fearless men in the convention. Mr. Medill's fame as an editor was world-wide, and for forty years he was a power in the state. Mr. Coolbaugh in his day was a great financier, who began his career in Iowa, subsequently engaging in banking in Chicago. Having observed the evils of special legislation in two states, he was very positive in his opposition to it, and carried his point in the convention. He was a man of strong convictions and great ability, but met with financial reverses in the panic of '73, and died by his own hand at the foot of the monument to Stephen A. Douglas in Chicago.

There were many other strong men in the convention, and their work stands the test today. It is not at all likely that another convention would improve upon it. It is a much safer and saner plan to amend a single article of the constitution occasionally where it is absolutely needed. No doubt the special charter for Chicago is a necessity to that city. The amendment now pending will enable the legislature to grant it. It will be good policy for the voters all over the state to mark their ballots for it.

GOOD POLICY FOR THE STATE

Should Adopt Constitutional Amendment—Give Chicago New Charter and Save Legislative Struggle.

In asking for broader powers of local self-government Chicago is not making a demand for anything unusual. Her proposed new charter will not be an innovation. At the most it will be nothing more than the powers and authority enjoyed by every large city in the United States. It will be nothing more than what Chicago had prior to the adopting of the present constitution.

Perhaps it may be that the people of Illinois generally are not aware that the other large cities of the Union have no township governments and no townships, that most of the other large cities have minor courts on a different system than that of justices of the peace and constables, but these things should be generally known by the voters. They should know also that there is not another city of importance in the Union that can not use its credit to a reasonable extent. This Chicago is absolutely forbidden to do by the terms of the constitution which limits the debt of cities in the state to 5 per cent. of the assessed valuation of the property within the corpor-

ate limits. Nearly all cities have a limitation placed on the amount of indebtedness which they can incur, but in no other state is it so restrictive, as in Illinois. This came about through the revenue law and a decision of the supreme court that the 5 per cent. limit applies to the assessed valuation of one-fifth instead of the full valuation of property. And Chicago is up to the limit with a very small public debt.

No other city has so many taxing boards and sub-municipalities. New York, Philadelphia, Boston, St. Louis—all have more adequate charters, and they get better results out of their revenues. Even with the notorious corruption of most of these places they are in better shape today as regards public improvements than Chicago is. In other words the people of those cities have more to show for their taxes than Chicago has. From every point of view Chicago is justified in seeking changes in her governmental system by way of a new charter and the constitutional amendment. Nothing whatever can be gained by the state in not granting these requirements. On the other hand the state would to some degree be the loser by a refusal. If the amendment is not carried the people of Chicago will try again. There will be the same struggles with the legislature as heretofore, and bills from other parts of the state will stand just so much less chance of being properly considered. These facts are well known by prominent men the state over. Republicans, Democrats and Prohibitionists alike favor the amendment for these reasons. The proposition should be voted for because it is good policy as well as being right.



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