

The Reform That Reformed Itself

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SOME TIME next fall the oldest and hardest municipal-reform movement in America will go on trial for its life. For the fifth time in thirty-two years the people of Cincinnati will vote to keep or to abandon proportional-representation voting, the key to a unique and surprisingly durable adventure in good city government.

Four times the voters of Cincinnati chose to keep P.R., but only by the slightest of majorities. Once again next fall, a few hundred votes will probably tip the scales—for continued reform or for a return to one-party machine rule. Technically, only a method of voting is at issue. But in reality this is a referendum on a municipal way of life.

Whatever its intrinsic virtues and defects, whatever its good or bad results in other cities, P.R. in Cincinnati has provided the means by which the dissimilar elements of the reform movement are fused into one cohesive body. P.R. is the force that gives them rough equality with the Republican machine. Its real function in Cincinnati, therefore, has been to provide two-party government for a city that had one-party government until 1925. If they abandon P.R., the people of Cincinnati will be voting to restore the old order, to give the G.O.P. machine the assurance of electing at least eight of the nine councilmen in every future election.

Do-Gooders Rarely Last

Reform in Cincinnati is a paradox of American politics. For this is not a city prone to innovation or to leveling social action. It is a city planted in the heart of the Taft country, with the climate and texture of a conservative hinterland.

From a pedestal in Lytle Park, a bronze Lincoln of heroic size looks with melancholy compassion westward down Fourth Street, between files of banks, office buildings, clubs, and well-bred shops. But the men of business and finance who people this street do not frequently look for guidance to the first leader of a Republican Party that was new and radical in his time—to the man who spoke at Gettysburg about “government of the people, by the people, for the people.” Nor do they put their trust in the apostle of modern Republicanism who spends his weekends at Gettysburg. The con-



servatism of the solid Cincinnatians who flank Fourth Street is the brand articulated by men of their own Ohio—McKinley, Hanna, Harding, Taft, Bricker, Humphrey.

Yet Cincinnati is also an island of progress and innovation in municipal government. With more than half a million people, it is the largest city governed by a city manager; it has the most honest and efficient government of any of the larger cities of the nation. What is much more remarkable, however, is the fact that Cincinnati has had this high order of civic efficiency and

integrity for thirty-two years without a break.

Lasting reform is a rarity. Typically, a city reforms only when corruption becomes so conspicuous that the voters get mad. Well-intentioned men move in, struggle against an evil system, and then give up after two or four or at most six years. Fervor, not endurance, is the pattern. The Nice People who promote reforms are almost never willing to go to the mound and pitch nine innings. They only want to toss out the first ball, preferably before a large crowd, when the new season starts. Politics, they figure, is like baseball, a game for professionals.

The persistence of good government in Ohio's second largest city is due most of all to the fact that the reformers, the Nice People who got mad, waded out into the main stream of politics. They knew politics was a dirty business, but they were persuaded it didn't have to be. So they went to the hustings themselves, much as other Nice People cover their blocks for the Community Chest or the Fine Arts Fund. They started out as do-gooders. And in spirit they are still do-gooders.

But where methods and skills were concerned, they soon turned pro.

Furthermore, this was a double-barreled reform. In the 1920's, these do-gooders reformed the city government. In the 1930's and early 1940's, under the hammer blows of economic depression, they transformed their own reform movement into an instrument of liberal social policy.

The Cox Empire

It all began gradually, as major reforms must, with the slow accumulation of smoldering indignation. From

1886 to 1925, Cincinnati was in the firm grip of a corrupt, conscienceless Republican patronage machine (which had seized power from an equally corrupt but less effective Democratic machine). This enter-



prise in exploitation was headed for twenty-nine years by George B. Cox, who ran the city amiably and profitably from a room over the Mecca saloon on lower Walnut Street. Cox progressed from bartender to saloonkeeper to bank president and millionaire, but his title was always simply "boss." He governed through two lieutenants, Garry Herrmann and Rud Hynicka. Herrmann, a jovial Teutonic type with a glad hand and a taste for beer, was Cox's ambassador to the German-American community, most of it still German-speaking then. Hynicka was a tough-minded, smooth-talking finger man who kept a card index on nearly everybody, with such entries from police and other records as might be needed to inspire a citizen's cooperation.

The Cox system was typical of predatory urban politics. These bosses worked hand in glove with the gas and electric and street-railway companies. City jobs were another source of power, and therefore of profit. Contractors on city jobs, a favored fraternity, made it worth while for the politicians who protected them from low bids by interlopers. Prostitution was made to pay off. So were the saloons. "Gambling privileges" were sold at good prices.

The streets were in such condition as to be downright hazardous. But the Nice People ignored the cavernous potholes, and kept themselves occupied with the symphony orchestra, the May music festival, the art museum, and various discreetly selected philanthropies. They kept their eyes sedulously off politics. It

was better not to look. In the words of Lincoln Steffens, Cincinnati in that era was "the worst-governed city in the United States."

This forty-year span of one-party corruption was interrupted by two brief reform administrations at City Hall, Democratic but abetted by irate Republicans. Neither could last, however, because neither created any alternative political structure. They had nothing behind them but public anger, which is a most ephemeral currency. Finally, the early 1920's brought a new kind of reform movement, led by a dozen or so intelligent and dedicated rebels, mainly Republicans.

With their diverse talents, they hammered out a draft city charter, and then by ceaseless campaigning created a sweeping reform movement, harnessing the long-accumulated anger of a sullen electorate. And in 1924 they got an overwhelming vote—92,510 to 41,115—for adoption of the new home-rule charter. It was a purely local phenomenon. In that same year, this conservative Republican city was voting complacently for Calvin Coolidge, along with the rest of a complacent country.

This ambivalence was reflected in the divergent courses of the Taft brothers. Charles P. Taft, then fresh out of Yale Law School, was in the reform movement from the start, parting politically from his older brother Robert, who chose to stick with the machine for life and who never lost a chance to disparage or oppose the reform program in his home town. Charles Taft's loyalty and enthusiasm for bipartisan innovation have never wavered, despite the fact that his defiance of the regular Republican organization at the local level has surely cost him a distinguished career in national politics. Climaxing a generation of service to good government, he is the mayor of Cincinnati today.

The charter adopted in 1924 was in the best pattern of a new order of municipal governance. It provided for a small council of nine members, chosen by P.R. from the city at large. It provided for a city manager, appointed by the council for an indefinite tenure. He was to have complete authority over administration, freedom to choose his subordi-

nates, and independence from politics. He was to be paid \$25,000, then not subject to income tax. The managership of Cincinnati was designed to be—and for years was—the most highly paid public office in the country, excepting only the Presidency and the mayoralty of New York. Provision also was made for a merit system among city employees, with selection by competitive examination and security of tenure, divorced from party politics.

At this point the reform leaders made a fundamental decision: to stay in existence as the City Charter Committee, made up of Democrats, independent Republicans, and non-partisans and to nominate candidates for council on their own ticket and campaign for them. They chose a slate of nine, secured the co-operation of the county Democratic boss, and elected six Charterites to the council. In fact, they only missed electing a seventh by seventy-seven votes. In 1925, at any rate, the people were still with them—strong.

Town and Gown

There had been a time when Cincinnati was a lusty, booming, ornery river town. On the eve of the Civil War it was the largest city west of the Atlantic seaboard except for New Orleans—which was the larger by only eight thousand. In the early 1870's, its leading citizens wanted new commerce to the south. So with city funds Cincinnati built the Cincinnati Southern



Railroad as far down as Chattanooga, Tennessee. Forgetful of its venturesome past, however, Cincinnati by the 1880's had lapsed into stolid conservatism as well as municipal corruption.

For many decades Cincinnati was predominantly German in culture and tradition, although this began

to wear thin during the First World War. German settlement left a heritage of lower-middle-class conservatism, typified in the *Bauverein*, or building-and-loan association—so much so that even now when a bond issue or tax levy fails at the polls, “the *Bauverein* mentality” is cited to explain what happened. A considerable Irish mixture added flavor to the community without undermining its conservatism. The later immigrations, from Italy and eastern Europe, largely passed Cincinnati by.

Protestants and Catholics were in a normal urban proportion. The Jewish community has always been small—less than five per cent of the total. But it is of immense importance to the cultural life of the city, its philanthropies, and not least its reform movement. From this small minority, and especially from an elite of long-established German Jews, the Charter Committee drew not only votes but numerous first-rank leaders, many workers in the wards, and a generous share of its financial support.

THOUGH a great many businessmen have joined the reform movement, the business leadership of the city has always been dominated by what are still called “Taft Republicans.” This is a somewhat confusing term nowadays in Cincinnati,

than the other two, has generally been pro-Charter. The press was a major hurdle for the reformers, and it still represents opposition.

Many a city that harbors a major university finds it to be a laboratory where new projects can be explored, mapped, and tried out experimentally. This cannot be said of the municipal University of Cincinnati, except in the fields of medical and other scientific or engineering research. Its presidents have kept a weather eye on the business and banking figures along Fourth Street, and a friendly smile and an open ear for the right-of-Taft tycoons at the stately Queen City Club, farther up Fourth Street.

The University has gone great guns in classical archaeology. One forms the impression that its field parties must by now have dug up half the barren soil of the Peloponnesus in their rediscovery of the ancient past. But in relation to the social and political life of twentieth-century Cincinnati, the University has been steeped in arid neutralism. (A group of U.C. students were discouraged from staging a mock political convention on the campus in 1951, because they couldn’t guarantee that Robert A. Taft would be their nominee. Ben Tate, then Taft’s campaign treasurer, was at the time a member of the U.C. board of directors.)



where Charles the Liberal reigns at City Hall. By and large, it describes people who are more conservative than the late Robert A. Taft ever was.

Echoing the ideas and emulating the posture of the business community, two of the three daily newspapers, the *Times-Star* and the *Enquirer*, were hostile to reform from the outset. The *Post*, less influential

The climate and soil of the river city were not conducive to political innovation. Yet reform proceeded. The Charterites chose as their first city manager Colonel Clarence O. Sherrill of the Army Engineer Corps, previously in charge of public works in Washington, D.C. Sherrill was a martinet and a Virginia reactionary, but he had the virtue of complete political inde-

pendence, and he knew how to get ahead with public improvements. For five years the new régime planned and built, and reshaped its public services. Businessmen or business-minded lawyers dominated



the council, made policy, and allotted funds.

Reform government in those years meant economy, honesty, modern methods and equipment, and freedom from partisan abuses. It did not mean social vision, experimentation, progressive policies on racial matters, or expansion of welfare services. Cincinnati had moved from the smugness of a corrupt city to the more justifiable smugness of an honest, efficient city, inordinately proud of its suddenly contracted virtue. But it still was governed strictly to the taste of conservative business leaders in a conservative city, sharing to the full the assurance of American business in the late 1920’s.

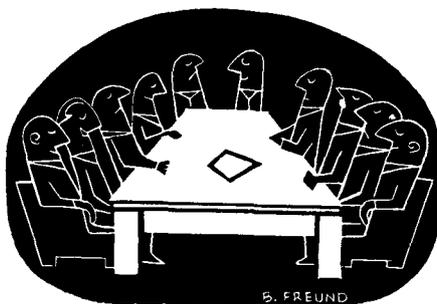
Topographically, reform in Cincinnati was still on the hilltops where it began—among the Nice People. On the hilltops, in a great sprawling semicircle, were clusters of tree-lined, winding streets inhabited by the middle and upper classes. The typical Charter meeting of the early years was a late-afternoon tea in the spacious home of a well-heeled lawyer or businessman, with a gentlemanly Charter candidate for council speaking to thirty or forty well-dressed women, wives of other well-heeled lawyers and businessmen.

Within the circling hills, like the arena of a giant amphitheater, is the central Basin, four hundred feet lower in elevation and lower still in income level. There lived the Negro population and the mass of unskilled and semi-skilled wage earners—under the protecting wing

of the Republican machine. This eleemosynary institution was ever alert to their welfare, turning up a basket of lump coal, a courthouse job, or a pint of whiskey around election time, as human need and party strategy jointly might require.

In contrast, the Charter movement was a silk-stocking affair. It had no roots in the Basin wards, no real ties with the low-income citizens. Its leaders didn't talk the language of the working class, white or black. Virtually all the Negroes of the city, then exceeding one-eighth of the population, regularly voted Republican—and commonly in the expectation of some tangible reward. A major part of the organized workers, particularly the building trades, were kept in line for the G.O.P. year after year. The Charter organization made no dent on the frontiers of these Republican enclaves. It didn't know how to reach them; its social conscience did not encompass them; and besides, it had what seemed to be a secure majority in the hilltop wards.

Even higher than the hilltop wards is Indian Hill—in the 1920's a plush suburb of large estates for the horsy set beyond the eastern margin of the city. One of its residents, John J. Emery, was the second president of the City Charter Committee, serving from 1935 to 1938. Representing the third generation of great wealth in industry and real estate, Emery has been deeply devoted to the city, and



always in a generous and constructive fashion. In the early years of the reform movement, he gave it respectability, as well as time and money. Emery has never abandoned the Charter Committee, even after other businessmen began leaving its ranks in droves. But somewhere along the line his interests were sidetracked to the Art Museum. He has recently been lavishing most of his spare time

in the acquisition of Botticellis and Persian miniatures.

Came the Depression

Towards the end of the 1920's, the Queen City on the Ohio seemed to be on a plateau of contentment. Even the Republican machine, after the first awesome shock, regained its cheerfulness. After all, it still had control of the county courthouse, with two thousand patronage jobs. On each jobholder it levied an informal tax of two to two and a half per cent of his salary, so it never lacked for campaign funds. It has consistently spent two to three times more than the Charter group in municipal campaigns.

But the Great Depression changed all this. Businessmen, hating That Man in the White House with every fiber, turned back to regular Republicanism—and to the Hamilton County machine and its candidates for city council. Wives dutifully followed suit. Some of the more gifted of the wives turned to oil painting, ceramics, and silk-screen printing as safe substitutes for block work in political reform. Before long, Robert A. Taft, attorney for the upper classes before an unheeding jury of the nation, began his crusade of the Right. And it came to be thought treasonable, on the hilltops at least, to violate party regularity. Furthermore, memories of the Cox era were losing their sharp definition. As a result, the ready sources of Charter funds and Charter votes were drying up.

Sherrill was replaced as city manager by C. A. Dykstra, a professional political scientist—able and knowledgeable, but not the type that businessmen warm to. Mass feeding and clothing of the jobless replaced the building of boulevards as the pre-eminent function of city government.

Riding Father Charles Coughlin's band wagon in 1935, an old-time Socialist and preacher named Herbert Bigelow, a tireless hater and baiter of public utilities, ran for council as an independent and won. When, later, he was elected to Congress, another independent replaced him. Thus did P.R. mirror the discontents of the electorate with mathematical precision.

Thus deserted by many of the Nice People, the Charter went



into a decline. It stayed there twelve long years, but kept a strong minority in council, thanks to P.R. The movement was held together through the lean decade largely by Councilman Albert D. Cash, an outspoken Irish-Catholic Charter Democrat. Cash later became mayor, and energetically proceeded to make the job into much more than a ceremonial title. Since his time, the city manager has been an unobtrusive, quietly efficient professional administrator, not a policymaker.

Cash's greatest service, however, was in reworking the ideology of the Charter movement to fit the contours of a new era. A devout New Deal Democrat, Cash made the Charter into a party of the Basin as well as the hilltops.

The Rise of Theodore Berry

This was possible, however, only because important new social forces were at work. As in most Northern cities, the Negroes, special victims of economic depression, were turning to the New Deal and the Democratic Party in ever-increasing numbers. In Cincinnati, they turned en masse from machine Republican to Charter. But it took from 1933 to 1939 for this change to register its full effect. And it took also the midwifery of a gifted Negro lawyer, Theodore M. Berry, who eventually was to become majority leader in council, its finance chairman, and vice-mayor.

The Charter Committee strategists reached out for the Negro vote with new policies on relief, recreation, employment, and housing that paralleled New Deal policies. Instead of dealing with the Uncle Tom types who had been content to pick up crumbs from the G.O.P. table, they deliberately sought out serious, self-respecting Negro leaders—men embodying the new dignity of a community that had grown in earn-

ing power, education, and knowledge of their rights as Americans.

Theodore Berry was the ablest and most promising of these new Negro leaders. He ran as an independent in 1947 and was defeated, but made a good showing. Two years later he ran again, this time on the Charter ticket, and won. He has been re-elected ever since, and undoubtedly can win every two years as long as he wants to hold a somewhat thankless job as councilman at \$8,000 a year. He can win because under P.R. voting he needs only about thirteen thousand first-choice votes, which the Negro community alone can supply with ease; and he has the support of many other Charter votes in reserve. For Berry has achieved a place of genuine leadership not merely in the Negro community but in the city as a whole.

Berry's public service has not been easy. Republican machine leaders bitterly resented the "theft" of their traditional monopoly of the Negro vote. Quite correctly, they blamed Berry and concentrated their fire on him. At times they have had some talented character assassins in their stable of speech writers and minor candidates. Every election has brought outrageous whispering campaigns against one of the most able and honorable civic leaders in all of Cincinnati's history.

ALONG WITH many Negro voters, the rapidly growing mass of organized industrial workers were joining the Democratic ranks in the 1930's. And here again the Charterites gradually found new support to replace their losses among the hilltop bourgeoisie. In 1933, in the trough of the depression, they elected James Wilson, a vice-president of the AFL and an amiable old-line labor figure of national prominence. He served two terms in the council. All during their twelve years in the minority wilderness, the Charterites had kept trying to elect another labor man. In 1945 they finally succeeded, and went on electing a labor candidate in the next four elections. Once they elected two—a CIO newspaperman and an AFL business agent.

The Charter was helped materially in all this by Jack Kroll, the well-known CIO theoretician who has kept

his home in Cincinnati and his hand in Cincinnati politics even though he spends most of his time in Washington. It also got help from the Cincinnati Central Labor Council, which was mainly responsible for keeping Harry Proctor, the AFL business agent, on the council for six years.

Without this new support from Negroes and labor, the reform movement would have died of malnutrition in the 1940's. Instead, the Charter Committee has lost a series of skirmishes in the hilltops but won a crucial battle in the Basin. In the process its character has changed profoundly. It had begun as a little band of do-gooders, with the support of many middle-class Republicans and the routine backing of the Democratic organization. It has emerged from depression and war as an authentic cross-section of the whole city.

Throughout most of its existence, the Charter Committee has gained immensely by the dedicated service of its executive director, Forest Frank, who heads the small paid staff. A former newspaperman, Frank took the Charter job in 1935. He has a phenomenal memory for names, faces, political statistics, and genealogical detail. He also has a talent for persuasion that is singularly valuable for keeping a large organization of unpaid volunteers steamed up, but not at each other. And he learned long ago how to make sure that somebody else—not

Forest Frank—gets the credit for whatever is achieved.

Weather Prediction

Reform in Cincinnati currently basks in the warm sun of public approval. The Charterites, with Charles P. Taft as mayor, enjoy a council majority of five—three Democrats and two independent Republicans. In the field of public improvements, new expressways are being extended through the rubble of demolished tenements and blighted areas are being leveled and redeveloped, or dressed up and renovated. The voters last year approved \$35 million of new bonds for public improvements—the bait to entrap \$200 million of Federal and state funds. A one per cent city income-payroll tax has solved the recurrent problem of insufficient revenues, of hand-to-mouth financing from crisis to crisis.

Claiming rightful credit for much of this, the Charterites have a good chance of holding their majority this fall. But they could lose an entire generation of accomplishment if they lost P.R. The most enduring city reform in America hangs by the slender thread of an intrinsically unpopular voting system.

Subject to this peril, reform has survived in Cincinnati because the party of reform has been continually reforming itself, in response to social changes. As in practically every other large American city, the Nice People of Cincinnati are moving steadily outward to the suburbs, beyond a corporate line frozen by a rural state legislature. Suburbia is siphoning off the type of people who were the typical Charterites in the 1920's. They take with them much of the Charter Committee's potential leadership and financial support. Cincinnati is on the way to becoming predominantly a community of wage earners, Southern whites, Negroes, and some white-collar workers. By and large, the Charter Committee has gotten most of their votes, but it has not converted them to the habit of rolling up their sleeves and getting into politics.

The sun is still warm over Cincinnati's historic reform movement. But there are dark clouds on the horizon.



B.F.

Khrushchev Charts

A New Economic Course

ISAAC DEUTSCHER

THE SUPREME SOVIET'S May decision to adopt, with a few modifications, Khrushchev's scheme for the overhaul of the entire Soviet industry is likely to have far-reaching consequences for the Soviet Union and therefore in some measure for the world at large. Khrushchev has set in motion a chain of developments no less important, though less spectacular, than the one he started last year with his exposure of Stalin at the Twentieth Congress.

This is indeed another great break with the Stalin era. With one stroke Khrushchev has attempted to sweep away the whole administrative structure of Soviet industry as it has grown up, taken shape, and become fixed in the course of nearly thirty years.

Involved in the new reform are no fewer than two hundred thousand functioning industrial concerns and about half that number of establishments still under construction. These concerns employ a good half of the Soviet Union's adult working population.

Obviously, no government undertakes so vast a reform unless it has weighty and urgent reasons for doing so. Last February Premier Bulganin admitted to the Supreme Soviet that the current Five-Year Plan had not been based on a realistic assessment of resources, that it had led to the waste and freezing of much capital, and that it was in need of a thorough revision. The government has so far not been able to produce the revised plan. Within recent months it has repeatedly reorganized the planning agencies, first splitting them up into two separate bodies, one designed for long-term and the other for short-term planning, and then merging them back into a single Gosplan, or supreme planning authority. The two chief planners have been dismissed or transferred: Maxim Z. Saburov in December and Mikhail G. Pervukhin

in May. They have been replaced by Joseph J. Kuzmin, a relatively unknown economist who has been appointed head of the Gosplan and a first deputy vice-premier, even though he was not a member of the Presidium.

But discontent in the Soviet ruling group with the economic-administrative setup inherited from the Stalin era can be traced much further back. When Malenkov took power, on March 6, 1953, he abolished a number of ministries within a few hours of Stalin's death. By March 15 he had cut their number from forty-five to fourteen. Later, at the time of Malenkov's eclipse, the ministries re-emerged.

KHRUSHCHEV'S scheme is broader than Malenkov's ever was. Where Malenkov merely tried to simplify the existing economic administration, Khrushchev is setting out to change the whole structure from top to bottom.

Hitherto, Soviet industry has been organized almost exclusively along vertical lines, each industry being controlled by a ministry in Moscow. There were almost no horizontal links between the various industries. A coal producer in the Ukraine, for instance, could not deal directly with a steel producer or a machine-tool producer in the same town or district. He could buy his mining equipment and sell his coal only through his ministry in Moscow, which dealt with the other industrial ministries.

In this way Stalin had reserved for Moscow the power of decision on almost any economic transaction. The resulting overcentralization had, from Stalin's viewpoint, great political advantages as well: It did not allow the producers on the spot to come together to express common interests, to formulate joint policies, or to combine in any degree against the center.



Khrushchev

With the advance of industrialization, however, the system has grown increasingly obsolete. Technological specialization brought into being ever new branches of industry—and ever new ministries in Moscow. The administrative machinery at the center grew incredibly cumbersome. Its various parts constantly overlapped. (Khrushchev revealed that no fewer than three ministries managed Moscow's electrical power plant!) The most inflated staffs could not hope to cope with the mass of important questions that producers were obliged to refer to Moscow. It was only because of its great inherent momentum that the Soviet industrial machine did not grind to a standstill.

A New Federalism

The principle of Khrushchev's reform is horizontal organization. The whole of the Soviet Union is now being divided into ninety-two regions, each with an economic council, or Sovnarkhoz, of its own. All state-owned concerns of any given area (with the exception of smaller factories run by the municipalities) come under the management of the regional council. The coal producer, the steelmaker, the engineer, and the textile manufacturer on the spot will at last be able to deal directly with each other, or, if need be, through their regional council.

Most of the economic ministries in Moscow have been abolished. Even those that are left—the ministries in charge of defense industry—are divested of the functions of management.

Regional economic councils had