

# LARGE AUDIENCE HEARS MR. GIBBES

### Steps Taken Looking to Thorough Consideration of Commission Form of Government.

Before a large-sized and representative audience at the court house last night Mayor W. H. Gibbes of Columbia delivered a polished and retentive address upon the commission form of government. His discourse was thoroughly interesting as he told of the early days of the commission government and its advantages over the old form.

At the conclusion of his address definite steps were taken towards getting the matter in shape by the appointment of a committee to name a committee of 100 to decide if Asheville ought to have this form of government. Following is the resolution offered by W. B. Williamson and seconded by H. C. Allen:

1. Resolved, That the mayor, the president of the board of trade, the president of the Retail Merchants' association and the secretary of Central Labor union be appointed a committee of four to name a committee of 100 to consider the advisability of a change in our present city charter; that the mayor, the members of the board of aldermen and city attorney be included in the 100.

2. That in case the said committee of 100, after due consideration, shall deem it advisable and for the best interests of the city that the present city charter be altered, amended or substituted by another charter, that it shall then be the duty of the said 100 to draft and recommend to a subsequent mass meeting such form of charter as it shall deem for the best interest of the city. The mass meeting to which said committee of 100 is to report shall be called by the chairman of the committee of 100.

3. When any amended, altered or



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substituted charter is ratified, if such be the case, by a subsequent mass meeting, then the same shall be sent to the Buncombe county members of the legislature with the request that they secure the passage of a bill allowing the voters of Asheville to vote on said amended, altered or substituted charter.

Introduced by Mr. Parker.

The meeting last night was presided over by George L. Hackney, president of the Retail Merchants' association, who explained that the merchants were bringing Mr. Gibbes here to tell them of the working of the commission government. The speaker was introduced by Haywood Parker, who stated that of about 100 cities which had adopted the commission form, not one had gone back to the old. Each city has to modify the commission form to suit its own conditions. "It's a grave problem to change the form of government and it is one which should demand the attention of all thinking men," he said.

In introducing his subject Mayor Gibbes said that the experience of Columbia was so limited that it was not yet prepared to talk with experience, although he had learned some things that could be changed in Columbia's form to advantage.

**Knew Little of Conditions.**

He admitted that he knew little of conditions here under the ward and aldermanic system, but that in many cities under the old system corruption and graft predominated. Men were usually chosen for their pull rather than the measures they may favor and in electing aldermen the spoils and graft system were entrenched.

Of the 75 cities, he said, which had been under the commission form of

government for a year or more not one had turned back. He attributed the foundation of the commission form of government rather to Washington than Galveston. This was begun at the foundation of the city and many changes were made. Later the government was changed back to the old-line government, and in 1873 the government was bankrupt and the commission form was brought in again in the form of a receiver. In 1878 they were given all the governmental functions.

He said he believed in the elective system for the commissioners. In Columbia the city had five commissioners but he believed that three would do the work—a city should not have any more than are actually needed. He believed that the mayor should have the right to divide out the departments to the men in accordance with their peculiar abilities. In Galveston, he said, of the five commissioners appointed in 1901, one had died, and only one had been defeated for re-election.

**Has Already Taken Steps.**

He had no means of judging conditions in Asheville, but he recognized that the city had already taken a step towards commission form of government by electing two aldermen at large and paying each alderman \$400 per year. If Asheville is better governed under the ward plan, he declared that it was probably due to the improvements noted and the city would probably do better if it goes the whole length and adopts the commission form throughout.

In some cities he said that aldermen pay good money to get elected although the positions pay no salary. He declared that this was sound to indicate that there was some graft somewhere.

He did not believe that the men of the greatest wealth or of the greatest business success were necessary to make good commissioners. He pointed to the fact that the greatest statesmen and public servants are often poor in this world's goods.

In the 68 cities which had the commission form for more than a year, not one serious charge of graft had been heard. In reply to the charge that the commission form was un-American he declared that a city government in America which is un-American is un-American. He said he believed in the short ballot—that is voting only on the principal officers—appointing the inferior ones—since this eliminated possibilities of ward heeler manipulating ballots and simplified matters for the voters. He believed that commissioners should be selected from the city without regard to ward lines. In the Columbia charter 25 per cent of the voters have to sign a petition asking to vote upon the government. The charter must provide the number of

commissioners and the manner of their election. He believed that all people not voting should be kept away from the polls and that any man who tries to fix a ballot for another should be prosecuted.

**They Drew Straws.**

He disapproved of the plan used in Columbia to draw straws to determine the length of the term of the commissioners. The men who receive the highest vote should serve the long term. He approved the plan of having a primary in which both parties participated, in cities where there were two strong parties. In Columbia the democratic party was the only one of consequence. He declared that it was a misfortune to any state not to have a strong opposition party. He believed it would be well to have only one

primary in Asheville, and use first, second and third choice system, to prevent second primaries.

In the meetings he would have all aldermen record their votes in the open. The minor officers, under control of commissioners, can be removed at any moment, if they are not doing right. He said that his experience had been that pretty poor aldermen sometimes made very good commissioners when responsibility was thrown upon them.

**The Initiative and Referendum.**

Explaining the initiative, he said that if a man wanted legislation enacted which the council refused to enact, if he got 20 per cent of the voters of the last election to sign a petition, the council would have to call an election; if they refused, the legislation asked

for immediately became a law. The referendum was like this: If a man wanted to defeat some legislation passed by the council, if he got the signatures of one-fifth of the voters in the last election, to ask for it, the council would have to call an election. If a majority of the voters favored it, it was law.

The recall system operated when one-fifth of the voters signed a petition asking for the removal of one or more of the councilmen. The election must be held and if the councilman is defeated, he is recalled and the man receiving the highest vote is given his place.

The Columbia form provided for a civil service commission which held examination and kept an eligible list from which policemen and other em-

ployees are selected.

He said that in Columbia they went into offices after the fiscal year, with a deficit of about \$90,000; they hoped by the end of the year to be able to pull out of the hole and next year to have a good margin. He advised Asheville commissioners to go into office at the beginning of a fiscal year.

He talked interestingly of the efforts made by Columbia to care for and cure the inebriates who came under arrest. He believed that much good was being done.

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