

Elect Mayor From the Board of Aldermen

(Continued from page 1)

of men, voted that the mayor should be elected by the board and their views and deliberations should have the careful consideration of your body. Every class of people in the city is entitled to be considered and I assume that you intend to hear them.

Petitions vs. Sentiment

"I don't think," continued Mr. Cansler, "that petitions furnish any accurate index of sentiment, nor do they indicate the sentiment expressed at public meetings. They count for little significance. I recollect attending a public meeting in the court house two years ago during the closing hours of the municipal election. Judging the sentiment expressed at the meeting it looked like the Municipal League was doomed but it was vastly different in the election of the following day.

Alderman Henderson did not feel that he should obligate himself, "because," he said, "I don't see any other way of electing a mayor than either by the people or by the board. Aldermen Bland and Keesler thought that the board and the committee were, or at least, should be open to conviction. Mr. Cansler was asked to continue.

"If we are going to stand by our guns your charter will go over two years, for there is only a short time left in which to get it in shape to be presented to the legislature. We must get together, compromise and make mutual concessions. We in Charlotte, have squabbled and held so many political scraps that it has almost reached the point where the people of North Carolina are thinking we are not capable of self-government and if we don't come together tonight then I will think so myself.

"My proposition is not what I want," continued Mr. Cansler, "but it is a proposition better than the board's contention that the mayor should be elected by the people. It has been tried all over Mecklenburg and all over North Carolina and without criticism. It is simply this, that the board of aldermen be required to elect the mayor from a member of the board.

"Now gentlemen, this is a compromise we can try for two years. If it fails, or if you decide you don't like it, repeat it and go back to the old form of government or some other way. It is nothing more than the plan which is in operation in this county, practiced by your board of county commissioners who elect their chief executive, the chairman. The people elect the members of the board separately and these then elect their executive head. In the proposition of allowing the seven aldermen to choose their own executive head, the people are getting their wishes. They thus vote not directly, but somewhat personally, too. I feel that you get more than we do through the compromise. It is not undemocratic, or there would have been kicks against it in all the counties of the state for these long years. It is no novel scheme. This is not what we wanted, but it is offered solely in the hope that we can get together. We must get together on this thing to save ourselves from further disgrace. There may be some who fear political deals through this method. It has not shown itself open to such attack before.

"It seems to be," continued Mr. Cansler, "that the only objection to this is purely sentimental. If the people are willing for their board of aldermen to collect and spend their money, from \$250,000 to \$300,000 a year, then they are willing for the board to elect their chief executive. It is not undemocratic for the board to elect their chief executive, as it is over North Carolina. It is prevailing now and it will continue to prevail. It is similar to that practiced by the board of directors of a corporation that elect its executive head.

"Does any man say that your chief of police is in many respects an important an officer as the mayor? Why don't the people ask to be allowed to vote for him? He has the burden of upholding the law in his hands and is responsible for the maintenance of peace, certainly a very important task. Yet no one wants to vote for him directly. The same is true of your clerk and treasurer. Into his hands goes all the money of the city. He is a responsible position, but the people don't care to elect him. When you give the board of aldermen plenary powers to manage the affairs of the city, you put their hands upon you elect a man yourselves over their heads. About the only thing this inalienable right is that you are talking about is the privilege of voting a man in and then voting him out at the expiration of two years.

The Compromise Favorable. Alderman Scott said Mr. Cansler's proposition appealed to him and he thought it would secure a better quality of aldermen provided they were elected at large. Alderman Garibaldi stated his approval of the measure.

"I see no objection to the compromise," he said, "and I object. You have converted me, Mr. Cansler. There is another thing that I should like to add also, and that is that we adopt the Australian ballot.

Consideration of this proposition to adopt the Australian ballot was postponed, however, to be taken up later. Mr. Scott was the next gentleman to be heard from.

"I believe," he said, "that if we adopt the plan suggested by Mr. Cansler the mayor ought to be taken from the seven and not from the three. Of the three elected at large one is going to be mayor. I believe it will better meet the situation and the approval of the people if the whole seven are elected at large, then the seven elect the mayor.

Thus far silence had reigned among the committee of 10, and their views on the committee. Mr. J. P. Caldwell was called on for his views.

"Mr. Cansler has stated the case so well," he said, "that it is not necessary for me to say anything. I don't like the proposed compromise nearly so well as the original phrase of the charter, but I am ready to fall in line with that plan in the interests of peace and harmony.

"In regard to Mr. Scott's plan, I am willing to adopt either. I'll add this, however, I had a talk with Senator Pharr the other day and he said that whatever is done will have to be done quickly. Three days will be required to put the measure through and as the present draft is merely a skeleton, a week or more will be needed in which to draw up the charter in full. We must hurry.

Mr. Weddington said the plan suggested by Mr. Cansler was rather new, but if it should be accepted he would suggest that each ward select one alderman each and the city three. "I think the wards desire this," he said, "and that the people want it.

"If you are going to adopt either of the plans," said Mr. Keesler, "I prefer the mayor being selected from the seven instead of the three. If you are going to confine his election or selection to a few, for goodness sake give us seven from which to take him.

Judgment

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Mr. Keesler Favors the Measure. At the conclusion of Mr. McRae's remarks, Mr. Keesler rose and said he would not be true to himself, to his own conscientious convictions on this subject, nor to the people whom he, in fact, represented, if he failed to say a word on this important feature of the proposed charter. He said: "Mr. Cansler has stated the case so well that I don't say that I have anything to add to it. I have nothing to say. But unless you expect to exercise this power, believing that it is just and reasonable, there is no need putting these to the disadvantage and possible inability to float their bonds and thereby hurt them.

"You don't think then, Mr. McRae, that the city has the right and power to regulate these public service corporations who get their franchises for nothing?" asked Mr. Murphy.

"I don't say that," said Mr. Keesler. Mr. Chambers contended that the corporations paid an ad valorem tax just like the individual who pays taxes on his property.

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"I understand from Mr. McRae that all the companies contemplated in this particular clause can not well be reached by a license tax, and for that very reason I am strongly in favor of this measure rather than a license tax for it is general, and will cover all in such a manner as the aldermen may, under this authority, find just and proper."

Mr. Keesler here interposed objection to that statement stating how, by state legislation and authority, all could be reached by some other plan which he preferred.

"I fail to see any logic gentlemen, in the contention that inasmuch as the legislature meets every two years, and can, at any time, insert the clause into our charter, that it should not now be done, or that by so doing a club is raised over the heads of the public utilities, which would be a hindrance to you, that if purchasers of the bonds of these companies would hesitate to buy them on account of this fair measure they would only hesitate the more if no realizable action had already been taken, but felt that even some drastic steps might be taken at the very next sitting of the legislature.

Mr. Keesler rose again and wanted to know if Mr. Keesler favored an income tax.

Mr. Keesler replied that he would answer that when he got to it. Continuing, Mr. Keesler said: "The board can never know when the proper time has arrived for imposing a just and reasonable tax, if any, upon these people if some power, just such as herein contemplated, is not given them. We have presented here for your consideration and ask you to ratify some very drastic measures, touching the masses of the people. Menstruous, which would seem to you that burdensome beyond their powers of endurance, but they will likely be passed; yet some are absolutely unwilling to get statements from these companies to the end that a reasonable tax may be imposed, if the facts so found justify."

"It was a dark hour for Charlotte when the Independent Telephone Company passed away and we were left without competition in the line. If the Southern Bell Company, upon proper inquiry, is found to be not paying a reasonable tax, then it should be required to do so. So with the others. I will mention another corporation, the C. S. Now, without having facts and figures before me I make bold to say that it might be found, and it looks to me that way, that the company which is not being called upon to pay out vast sums in street improvements, and, in consequence ought to be released from additional burdens at this time. Can the same be said of these others?"

"Give the aldermen the power to get these statements, and from them to ascertain what an imposing their part into the public treasury. If all are doing so, no additional tax will be imposed, I warrant you. And if some are, and others are not, then let the matter be equalized justly and fairly, and no one will be hurt."

Pole Tax. The question taxing the telephone, telegraph and other companies for use of the streets in placing poles received considerable discussion. It was finally decided to impose a tax not exceeding one dollar per pole per annum, giving the board the power to regulate the rate to be charged.

Permanent Street Improvements. When last section of the charter relating to permanent street improvements was read whereby the cost of such improvements must be borne entirely by the owners of abutting property where the street car line does not run and payments to be made in 10 yearly installments, Mr. Scott offered an amendment excepting the Tryon and the Boulevard. Colonel Kirkpatrick seconded the motion and then ensued a right lengthy discussion. Mr. Cansler begged the board not to interfere with the street improvement scheme, saying that was the only way to have good streets, for those who would receive the benefits pay for them. "This is the only just and equitable way," he said. Finally Mr. Scott's amendment was carried, providing that East Trade as far as McDowell; North Tryon as far as the Seaboard Air Line station and West Trade as far as the Southern passenger station be excepted from that provision requiring a petition from one-third of the property owners. Then a vote was taken on the original provision with Mr. Scott's amendment and was carried by a large

majority. Another amendment by Mr. Scott, providing that property owners be not required to pay for street improvements other than once in 10 years, was also carried.

The next and last section of the charter subjected to a discussion was that provision in regard to extending jurisdiction of the recorder's court.

Colonel Kirkpatrick moved that the entire section be stricken out and his motion received a second, which precipitated the discussion. Mr. Weddington advocated the original measure, stating that during his service on the board of county commissioners he had found that the county had been forced to spend large sums on petty cases that should have been settled in the recorder's court.

Colonel Kirkpatrick argued that such a provision would work a great hardship upon the poor and ignorant who would have to appear in the recorder's court and that for this reason he was firmly opposed to it.

After a little spicy discussion the motion was put but lost. Then the original provision was carried.

As a last act before adjourning at 12:10 a. m. the board passed a motion by Mr. Scott providing that Messrs. T. C. Guthrie and E. R. Preston assist City Attorney McRae in drawing up the charter preparatory to sending it to the legislature.

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