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LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT, GOVERNMENT CONTROL

AND THE

CALCUTTA MUNICIPAL BILL.

BY

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IT may be said without fear of contradiction, as a fact which can lose no force by repetition, that there is no more important or difficult question among the many great questions which occupy the attention of the Government of India at the present day than the sanitation of our cities and agricultural populations, and that it has not received adequate or sufficient attention. The difficulty of the problem consists in determining how to carry out necessary and moderate reforms without pressing unduly on the resources of poor populations, how substantially, but with judicious speed, to raise standards of health and life by steady and persistent pressure on well-defined plans of administration, and how to ascertain the precise point to which it is practically possible to carry sanitation without exciting political opposition of a serious character. The action of Government has been to practically divest themselves of direct responsibility in these important matters which have been relegated to the various local and Municipal bodies to which the local Government of most Provinces in India has been entrusted, and one of the objects of this paper is to establish that there are no well-defined plans of administration in sanitary matters or steady and persistent pressure in the direction of reform, and to examine the causes, which, in our opinion, have directly contributed to the decay of these bodies as they now exist.

The chief impelling forces which have led to the success of Local Self-Government in England are absent in India. Our local authorities are entrusted with large powers in all essential matters of sanitation with insufficient means, as compared with their responsibilities; the members of these Local Boards have not the experience in the administration of public affairs to qualify them for the efficient discharge of their duties, without adequate guidance and

control, or the technical knowledge necessary to enable them to realise fully the extent of their responsibilities. They have no educated local public opinion or bodies of independent professional men to guide them. There is no local press with sufficient weight to materially influence the masses on these questions, and the necessity of guidance and direction by experienced experts appointed by Government to secure the most moderate measure of success is under these conditions absolute. The most striking defect in the administration of the present law appears to be the absence of efficient control and direction over these bodies by the Central Government. Government has put its hand to the plough with weak and halting hands, because it has never honestly believed in representative government, and it is no exaggeration to state that these institutions which might have been made a brilliant success with moderate control and fostering care are drifting into absolute failure. It is necessary to write frankly and strongly to draw the attention to this subject which it requires. The time has passed when these institutions could be damned with faint praise or regarded with amused contempt. They have justified their existence and the policy which constituted them, and they must be accepted as permanent factors in our system of administration, and they must be galvanised into a position of greater usefulness by judicious control and guidance, and funds must be placed at their disposal by local taxation on a scale commensurate with their responsibilities. If the powers and opportunities given to them have been inoperative, the responsibility of failure, where failure exists, rests entirely with the Government, which has neglected to exercise the powers given to it by law for direction and guidance with promptness, clearness, and decision. It is unfair to throw the responsibility of this failure on the crude administrative agency, which is too often blamed for this result. To the very best of their knowledge, in proportion to their education and ability, these bodies have struggled to fulfil the duties they greatly prize ; it is not surprising that they have failed to make Local Self-Government the success it might be, because in every country where it has been tried it has failed under the same conditions, and notably at the inception of the institution in England it failed,

but it is surprising that the spirit of Local Self-Government has taken such a strong hold on the people, and that so much has been done with the imperfect machinery provided under the Local Government Acts.

With entire absence of political foresight, Government has failed to sufficiently recognize that the future success of Government in India is inseparably dependent on the development of representative government, and we desire to insist on the necessity of strengthening these bodies, of bringing them into line with the best models of Local Self-Government in England, and of raising them into the high position they should occupy in the framework of the administration of the Empire. The history of Local Self-Government in England may, for the purposes of this paper, be said to commence from 1835, when the Reform Act was passed, and the new Parliament commenced, by instituting an inquiry into municipal institutions in England. At that time there were a hundred and seventy-eight municipal corporations in England governed by old charters, alleged prescriptive rights, immemorial customs, and self-created usages, and none of them were accountable to any central authority or held to any duty of making public its expenditure or transactions; they practically illustrate the inevitable consequence of self-government in its most elementary phase. The Commission reported to the effect that the municipal institutions in question were for the most part in the hands of narrow and self-elected cliques, who administered local affairs for their own advantage rather than for that of the borough; the inhabitants were practically deprived of all power of Local Self-Government, and were ruled by persons in whom they had no confidence. The corporate funds were wasted; the interests and improvement of the town were uncared for; local courts were too often corrupted by party influences, and failed to render impartial justice; and municipal institutions, instead of strengthening and supporting the political framework of the country, were a source of weakness and a fertile cause of discontent. The Municipal Corporation Act of 1835, which was the result of this enquiry, admitted to the Burgess right all property owners and all occupiers of rented property which was rated as worth £10 per annum. It provided for the election of the Mayor and

members and Alderman in the proportion of one-third of the number of councillors, and established on a fair representative system the agency of Municipal Government, which, with some modifications unnecessary to refer to here, is in force at the present day.

It would extend this paper to unreasonable length to attempt to trace the gradual evolution of the system of Local Self-Government as it exists in England at the present day ; that it is has been a gradual and cautious development by an eminently practical people is shown by the fact that the legislation between 1835 and 1882 is contained in no less than 55 Acts of Parliament, which were consolidated in 1888 and 1892, and that most of these Acts were framed after laborious Parliamentary inquiry. There has been no corresponding legislative activity in India in these matters, and now we have to face a position which proposes not cautious amendment and development, but a revolution in the administration of local affairs. The history of the English Acts shows a progressive tendency to institute a gradually strengthened system of control by the Central Government ; the practical difficulty was found that it is easier to frame Municipal Acts than to work them, and that without State control the big machines would not satisfactorily move.

Government control was first instituted in 1848 by establishing a Central Board of Health, and it was further developed by the establishment of the Local Government Board in 1871. The Local Government Board, which is at present the controlling authority, is an impersonal body, consisting of Her Majesty's principal Secretaries of State, assisted by an able staff of engineering and medical experts. It has full powers of inquiry into all matters which concern the public health ; it has powers of direction when local bodies make default in carrying out the duties assigned to them by law ; and it has powers of control in the shape of sanction after local inquiry to all works which require to be carried out from borrowed capital. The impersonal form of the Government Board has probably been adopted to shield the Government of the day from the political unpopularity which might be attached to enforcing local taxation required for sanitary works.

The practical result of the active exercise of Government control has been a substantial reduction of the death-

rate in rural and urban areas shown by the following statement :—

DEATH-RATE PER 1,000 POPULATION.	1851—60.	1861—70.	1871—80.	1881—93.	1893.
Rural Districts	... 19'9	19'7	19	17'5	17'2
Urban Districts	... 24'6	24'8	23'1	20'3	20'4

These figures mean that in 1851—60 the average expectation of life was 40 years, and in 1893 it was 50 years in urban districts. In rural districts the same figures stand at 50 and 58.

After reconstituting Municipal Corporations on a plan of reasonable representation, the next great step in sanitary reform taken by the reformed Parliament was the passing of the Registration of the British Death and Marriage Act of 1836, which at the cost of the Central Government established an efficient agency for recording the facts on which all sanitary progress must be based. The institution may be said to date from 1841, when the first report of the Registrar-General was published. These annual reports, which have been continued to the present day, bring into strong statistical relief, in terms intelligible to the people, the broad lessons to be learned from vital statistics properly arranged for practical use by practical men. The measure of the success and progress of municipal government is the death-rate of the population for which it is responsible, and these vital statistics constitute the justification of control, of compulsory legislation and taxation, and they indicate with unerring accuracy the direction in which local administration must develop. It is difficult to overstate the value of these returns when they are carefully prepared, because carefully arranged statistics appeal in the most direct manner to the common sense and self-interests of the population affected. Local bodies are slow to accept the opinion of experts, however eminent they may be, when they entail taxation, unless they are supported by easily understood facts. The Central Government cannot divest itself of responsibility for the accuracy and compilation of these returns on which all measures of control must be based, and the point requires careful consideration in the proposed new Municipal Act for Calcutta. The last published annual statis-

tics of the Calcutta Corporation give point to these remarks, because the facts are not arranged to give proper effect to the lessons they convey, and we have the less hesitation in criticising them because the present Health Officer is not responsible for them. Perhaps the most important point in the report, which requires the attention of Government, is the statement that they are inaccurate and untrustworthy in important particulars. The main figures given in the report are embodied in the following statements :—

Population of Calcutta proper ...	...	...	466,460
Number of deaths per annum ...	...	...	15,049
Death-rate per thousand ...	...	...	32·2
Added area population ...	...	...	215,100
Number of deaths per annum ...	...	...	9,616
Death-rate per 1,000 in suburbs...	...	...	44·7
Total population of city and suburbs ...	...	...	6,81,560
Total number of deaths in suburbs and city ...	...	...	24,665
Average death-rate of Municipal Calcutta ...	...	...	36·1
Cholera death-rate of Municipal Calcutta ...	...	...	3·4

The town is divided into 25 wards, with a population varying from 4,820 in the case of Hastings and 4,590 in the case of Bamunbustee, to 41,657 in the case of Jorasanko, and 42,591 in the case of Bhowanipore. It is useless, for any purposes of control or practical municipal administration, to suppose that any opinion can be formed from the statistics of large blocks much exceeding 5,000 in population. An average death-rate of 36·1 in a large population means that in many sections it will be found to extend to persistent death-rates at least three times the average death-rate, and these constitute the plague spots it is necessary first to deal with. In the urban area the highest death-rate in Burtollah was 39·8 per 1,000, and in the Suburbs, Entally heads the list with a death-rate of 48 per 1,000. The terrible significance of these figures applied to what is largely a non-resident population of selected lives has not been emphasised either by Government or the Health Officer. Bamunbustee, which is in the centre of the European quarter, has a death-rate of 33 per 1,000, and in Hastings the figures are 46·3 in a population of 4,820. The death-rate in Park Street is 10·8 per 1,000, and in Fenwick Bazar, with a population of 28,366, it is 22·3 per 1,000. In the early English Sanitary Acts the standard death-rate was fixed at 23 per

1,000, and it was enacted that a town having a higher rate than 23 per 1,000 might form the subject of a Government inquiry. In many towns at the present day the death-rate is below 18. It is probable that the Fenwick Bazar ward gives a safe standard, to which the rest of the town may attain ; and if we take 23 per 1,000 as the standard at the present day for Calcutta, it tends to show that the preventable deaths amount to 13 per thousand, or to 8,850 human lives in the course of the year, and probably to 50,000 cases of serious preventable sickness. The deaths in the suburbs alone might be reduced by one-half, or by 5,000 per annum. If the Commissioners have been slow to act to improve this state of things, the responsibility is due to the apathy of previous Governments, which have passed statements such as these for years without remark or inquiry, and never themselves realized the full danger of the situation until plague threatened to enter Calcutta, and then they rightly first directed their attention to the conservancy arrangements of the town. Without efficient conservancy, sanitation must fail, and with tons of filth and rotting refuse in most premises, no water-supply and drainage can be an effective protection. The Commissioners, with some natural friction, owing to the way in which the Government monition was conveyed to them, at once responded to pressure, and the improvement in the death-rate in the current year in Bombay, as well as Calcutta, is no doubt largely due to improved conservancy. With regard to the added area, the Corporation initiated large works, which will take a crore of rupees and some years to complete, without the direct and emphatic pressure which should have been applied by Government at an earlier stage. The only step in inquiry has been the appointment of the Building Commission on the statement of the Health Officer that the high death-rate in the town was due to overcrowding in unhealthy areas and bustees. As a matter of opinion the correctness of this supposition will be conceded by all who are acquainted with our slums ; but if conviction is to be carried to the rate-payers, and if their consent is to be obtained to sanc-



tioning the rates necessary for improvements, the Health Officer must support his position by statistics. We look in vain in the Health Report for any statement classifying the death-rate in over-crowded areas, or in unhealthy bustees, or in bustees which have been improved, and it is plain statements of facts of this description only that can reasonably be expected to carry that conviction to the rate-payers, which will crystallize into action under a system of local self-government.

The cholera death-rate varies from 1·3 in Collinga to 5·8 per thousand in Coomertolly; in the Suburbs, Entally heads the cholera list with a death-rate which is also 5·8 per thousand. The total number of deaths from cholera was 2,349, of which 1,543 deaths took place in Urban Calcutta. The fever death-rate was 12·7 per thousand in Urban Calcutta and 17 per thousand in the Suburbs. In Calcutta city the fever death-rate was greatest in Mocheepara, where it was 16·2 per thousand, and Colootolla has a fever death-rate of 15·9 and Hastings 25·9. With regard to the Suburbs, the canal area shows a mortality from fever amounting to 23 to 28 per thousand; the figures for Bhowanepore and Alipore are 12·6 and 8·8, and in Entally 21 per thousand.

Most of the cholera mortality is known to be due to filthy tanks. The high rate in the Suburbs is said by the Health Officer to be due to the absence of drainage, but this statement requires explanation, because it is more directly due to tanks. In many blocks in the Suburbs the system is to drain foul surface water into tanks with a system of main drains which only carry off the overflow from tanks; and the tank area is 20 to 25 per cent. of the whole area; no prohibitions will prevent people from bathing and washing themselves and their utensils in these tanks, and in this way they act as centres for the spread of disease and they act in another way by keeping up the spring-level in their immediate neighbourhood. It may be said that these causes are sufficiently well known, and no doubt they are written in such large figures that the lessons they teach are evident to the trained sanitarian, but they must be written in much larger figures if they are to influence the people. If it is admitted that cholera and fever are directly caused by dirty tanks, we should be clearly informed of the number of tanks to

be dealt with and what has been done, and what remains to be done to deal with them systematically, and the operations should be conducted on a well-defined plan designed to show clearly the effect on the death-rate of the remedial measures carried out. At least some of the high death-rate of Calcutta is due to metalled roads sodden with filth due to the disgusting practice of throwing rubbish into the streets for removal by the carts of the Health Officer after they have been swept up by expensive establishments. The consequences of this insanitary practice have been frequently brought to notice, but the report of the Health Officer is silent as to what has been done to remove it. It would be easy to extend this list, but sufficient has been said to show that Government cannot divest itself of the duty of prescribing the forms in which sanitary reports should be prepared, and the duty of inquiring into such local death-rates as five per cent. which now blot the history of the Calcutta Corporation; the terrible meaning of these figures and the relation they bear to the results of Local Self-Government has never been pointed out to the Corporation with sufficient emphasis and directness. The Corporation has never failed to carry out any measures which have been pressed upon it by Government, and whatever the alleged shortcomings of the Corporation may be in these and other particulars, the absence of Government control is entirely responsible for the results. At the present time the large number of medical officers on plague duty in Calcutta with much time at their disposal affords an opportunity of carrying out an inquiry into high local death-rates and their causes which may not soon occur again.

Turning next to the statistics of rural districts published by the Sanitary Commissioner of Bengal, the same high death-rates are annually pigeon-holed in the Government Secretariats with little remark, with no special inquiry, and without any attempt being made on a scale commensurate with the necessities of the situation to deal with them on those well-defined lines of administration which alone can command any substantial progress.

This state of hopeless inertia is likely to continue until the plan followed by the English Government is adopted of appointing Central Boards of trained medical and

engineering experts on a scale sufficiently liberal to enable them to properly perform their duties of inquiry and specific direction, until the Imperial Government and public opinion in England is roused to a sense of their responsibilities in these matters, and until the measures of protection are extended to our agricultural populations, which have done so much for the coolies of Assam. The institution of Local Self-Government in India is one that, at its outset, required careful nursing and in a pre-eminent degree great watchfulness and readiness to gradually remedy defects, to build up the system by slow degrees to the highest standard of efficiency attainable. The political sentiments attached to Local Self-Government are of the highest value to the Empire, and necessary to the development of India in the scale of nations. It is now too late to discuss the fitness of the people to rule themselves; the principle of Self-Government must be accepted as an inalienable fact, and it cannot be abrogated by the Municipal Bill now before the Bengal Council. Government cannot come before Parliament, to which the case must be ultimately carried, with clean hands, because they have never in any form exercised the powers given to them by the Legislature to tactfully direct their administration, and we have seen that without this direction and control Local Self-Government has failed even with the people of England, where the success of Local Self-Government has been due entirely to the judicious guidance of the Central Government.

This is certainly the view of the case which will be taken by English statesmen. It has been assumed that these local bodies are in themselves absolute and capable of discharging their duties with no effective control, and nothing has been done to guide, restrain or propel them. Government has failed to exercise the large powers given to them by the Legislature to keep these bodies in the active exercise of legally imposed and responsible functions; they have not made themselves acquainted with the defaults of these bodies, or suggested reforms or instituted those inquiries which could serve as a safe basis for legislative or administrative action. It is proverbially a bad workman who quarrels with his tools, and you cannot in this case get rid of your tools, in the summary way proposed in the Municipal Bill as it now stands, and which

as a practical administrative measure is known to be unworkable.

If the history of representative institutions teaches anything at all, it has shown that the death-rate of a city is a distinctly reducible factor by a properly organised control over sanitary administration, and if every abnormal death-rate had been followed by prompt inquiry, and the specific direction of Government to take action where the origin of disease could be distinctly traced to tanks, unhealthy areas, defective water-supply or other matters within the competence of Municipal agency to deal with, the sanitary state of Calcutta, its high rate of infant mortality and extraordinary local death-rates would not now demand the attention it does.

India is a country where great calamities in every Province are almost normal in the shape of storm-waves, famines, pestilence, earthquakes and wars, and they exist on a scale which appears to blunt the official perception to the smaller requirements of the every-day sanitary administration of a city, in which thousands of valuable lives are sacrificed yearly by the neglect of elementary principles of municipal administration.

The executive strength of all municipal enactments rests in the power to enforce certain sanitary rules by judicial proceedings: the failure of Government to provide proper judicial establishments necessary to enforce the existing very imperfect Code of laws has led to their becoming almost a dead letter and affords another instance of the default of Government in exercising proper control over municipal proceedings.

A purely Government department may perhaps be a successful solution of all administrative difficulties, but Government by a department controlled by a sham form of Local Government can never succeed; you must accept the principles attached to local representation as a necessary adjunct of local taxation or you must abandon it altogether.

A Government has large legitimate powers of controlling representative bodies, by enforcing the performance of duties when they are neglected, by framing bye-laws and by amending the law when it requires amendment and seeing that it is obeyed, by regulating the representation of classes, and by providing for a sufficient leavening of

the highest classes of community both in status and knowledge; but you cannot repress over-zeal and attempt to muzzle a representative body by Act of Parliament in the manner proposed in the draft bill, and when this becomes necessary representative Government is clearly not suited to the circumstances of the case under consideration.

It is admitted on all sides that a revision of what may be called the departmental sections is necessary, but the time has arrived for the absolute withdrawal of the constitutional clauses. It is hopeless to expect that persons of a high-class, either socially or intellectually, can be found to come forward and give up their time to the affairs of the city, and accept the position as members of a great corporation to which they are relegated under the Act as it stands. In writing on this subject we may quote Mill: "The entire business of their town," he says, "is not an object more than sufficient to induce men whose tastes incline them and whose knowledge qualifies them for national affairs to become members of a mere local body, and to devote to it the time and study which are necessary to render their presence anything more than a mere screen for the jobbing of inferior persons under the shelter of their responsibility;" and in another paragraph he goes on to say "that it is important for every purpose which local bodies are designed to serve, whether it be the enlightened and honest performance of their special duties or the cultivation of the political intelligence of the nation, that every such body should contain a portion of the very best minds of the locality which are thus brought into perpetual contact of the most useful kind, with minds of a lower grade, receiving from them what local and professional knowledge they have to give, and in return inspiring them with a portion of their own more enlarged ideas and higher and more enlightened purpose."

If the existing Act does not provide fully for the representation of all the miscellaneous classes which constitute so large a proportion of the heterogeneous population of Calcutta, if the European element requires strengthening, and if in the opinion of the Local Government the Corporation requires strengthening by the addition of the very best minds of the locality, the remedy is in their

hands in the power given to them by law of appointing twenty-five members of the Corporation. It has been said against this view that the fifty elected members waste so much time in talking that the best minds, especially of the European section of the community, refuse to be nominated, and as a solatium and an inducement to these gentlemen to exercise their constitutional rights a fee of rupees thirty-two is to be offered to members attending meetings of the General Committee if they are so fortunate as to be elected members of that body.

The course taken by the English Acts is to dignify the position of Municipal representatives by titles such as Councillor and Alderman, which are much valued by the holders of these offices, and in no respect is the attitude of Local Governments to Municipal institutions more strongly illustrated than in their neglect to reward public services of the very highest order extending over twenty years in some cases by suitable titles and decorations ; there is probably no first-class town in England where the services of leading members of the Corporations have not been acknowledged by the Imperial Government by personal distinctions of this class, and they form a very tangible and worthy inducement to give up time and experience for public purposes. The best men in the Corporation strongly object to payment in money for their services, for reasons which are too well known to require statement here, and are of opinion that honours conferred by the Crown for meritorious services are the only rewards which they can accept with dignity to themselves and their constituents. It would give satisfaction to the majority of the Commissioners if these objectionable clauses are struck out, and it will be difficult to defend them against sentiments of this kind on the final reading of the Bill. With regard to European representation, it is known that at least twelve European Commissioners can be returned without trouble in Wards Nos. 12 to 18 inclusive, and that with the Government nominees they can sufficiently acquire a preponderating influence, if they choose, in the local Councils.

The much-talk-and-little-work theory is not entitled to serious consideration, because it could be remedied by judicious rules of debate, enforced by a strong and experienced Chairman, and this and a few alterations in the

method of recording the proceedings would soon effect the changes it is admittedly desirable to introduce in this respect. The reasons which prevent the European element from exercising their rights of representation are on the surface.

In the first place, it is due to the attitude of Government with regard to Municipal Institutions generally, and to personal services rendered to Municipal Boards. In the next place it is due to the fact that Europeans are all busy men, unable to spare time from the narrow margin left for recreation and exercise. In the third place the local taxes only amount to one-third of European rates, and they do not press sufficiently heavily to make it necessary to their interests to control them, and they have only a temporary interest in a city in which they are birds of passage.

When the existing Act was passed a good deal was said about increasing the interest of Europeans in local affairs, but the question remains very much where it was ten years ago, and it is illusory to expect any material change, unless the conditions we have referred to can be altered. By taking more active interest in local affairs and by carefully selecting their nominees, it may be possible to infuse more life into the institution, and to leaven it with men of business capacity and practical experience, but it does not require a new Act to correct the mistakes of past Governments in these particulars. The co-operation of Europeans of the best class in Municipal work would be invaluable, but in the absence of material interests, leisure and sufficient incentive, past experience shews that it is more than doubtful whether this assistance can be obtained, and it is unsafe to rely too much on it. In leaving this branch of the subject, it is necessary to state that many leading Commissioners consider that it would improve the status of the native Commissioners, and secure a better class of candidates for election if a high property qualification were made a necessary condition of election, and if this is the case, the proposal deserves careful consideration from Government.

For all the practical purposes which such bodies are required to fulfil the Corporation may be made a fairly representative body, and that it is even now capable of valuable services to Government was shown in the recent plague scare. The voluntary establishment of plague

hospitals in the principal quarters of the town by Vigilance Committees are services which appear to have been overlooked, and which are mainly due to the energy and local influence of Ward Commissioners.

The attitude of the Corporation generally is one of loyalty to the Chairman, and if they are properly treated they are loyal to Government. When a case has been clearly put before them with a clear expression of the Chairman's views, he is invariably supported. What has happened is that the work of the Corporation, as now constituted, has outrun the capacity of the Chairman and his secretariat staff to adequately manage, and further, the frequent changes in the office of Chairman is responsible for most of the delays; it requires an apprenticeship of at least a year to produce an efficient Chairman, and we have lost much time in the education of no less than four Chairmen in less than three years. Looking at the loose and slovenly way in which the papers on important subjects are placed before the Commissioners and the inadequate guidance of inexperienced Chairmen less perfectly acquainted with the facts to be dealt with than more experienced members of the Corporation, the delays which have occurred are less surprising than the fact that the Commissioners have consented to consider the questions loosely put before them at all. Government, and not the Corporation, is responsible for frequent changes in the office of Chairman. It does not require a new Act to strengthen the Secretariat Department and pass rules of debate. Under existing arrangements the Chairman is overwhelmed with a mass of executive detail which prevents him giving proper attention to the larger administrative questions, and he has no time to form those clearly-defined opinions which are necessary for the proper discharge of his duties and to carry out inquiries and study how best to present questions to the Corporation. Under the proposed Act he is to personally exercise powers under no less than 70 sections of the Bill, and the appointment of Deputy Chairman is evidently necessary and cannot be delayed. Having appointed a Chairman, the Act provides that he is to be left to carry out the orders and works sanctioned by the Commissioners and left undisturbed in the exercise of plenary executive powers. The Commissioners have never materially in-



terfered in matters of this kind, and there is no objection to strengthening the executive in a new Act. Having formed what is presumably a fair representative body of the interests concerned in the Municipal administration of the town, the Act then shows the want of confidence of Government in their representatives by subordinating them to a special Committee of twelve members, which are to exercise all the general powers of the Corporation without appeal to the general body. Government has less confidence in the result of the exercise of their own large powers of control and the common sense of the general body of the Commissioners than in the control of a Committee. The proportions are—

	Corporation.	General Committee.
Number elected ...	50	4
Nominated by Government ...	15	4
Nominated by the Trades ...	4	1
Nominated by the Chamber of Commerce	4	2
Nominated by the Port Trust ...	2	1
Total	75	12

The constitution of the general body of the Commissioners is that the elected members are to the nominated Commissioners as two to one, but, in fact, the administration is to be vested in a Committee of twelve, called the General Committee, over which the Corporation can only exercise limited control, and whose decision on all points of importance are final, and this Committee is to consist of nominated Commissioners, and elected Commissioners in the proportion of two to one, completely reversing the proportions on which the general body of the Commissioners is constituted. The general idea underlying these changes is that the administration of the town is to be made over to a small and compact body of business men framed on the lines of the Port Trusts which have admirably succeeded in Bombay as well as Calcutta.

The idea that such a system of administration can be successfully applied to Municipal affairs, is a chimera. The principle which has contributed to the success of the Port Trusts is that the administration of the comparatively simple questions attached to a dock and jetties are efficiently carried out by the persons who are most vitally interested in them. The administration of the affairs of

the City of Calcutta, on the other hand, are of a very varied and complex character, in which the rate-payers are most vitally interested, and trade and commerce have interests in a lesser degree, and the questions which will come before the new General Committee are of too great extent, diversity and complexity to be managed by any General Committee. Ten years ago, Municipal administration was chiefly confined to questions relating to roads and drains. To-day we have daily to consider larger questions connected with great town improvements. Electric lighting, tramways, great drainage works, water-works, and gas-works and the standards of conservancy have been raised, and, notwithstanding the alleged shortcomings of the Commissioners, there is a healthy tone of substantial progress, vitality, and adequate development in all these particulars. The Port Commissioners' items of business average ten per week; the administration of the Corporation is at the present vested in five committees, with a weekly average something like 60 items. It is impossible that any single committee can find time to deal thoroughly with the wide range of questions which would be submitted to them, and a large proportion of the business of the Corporation must be entrusted to the sub-committees provided for by the Bill, and to which the General Committee are authorised to delegate their powers. It may safely be predicted that things will remain very much as they are now, except that the orders of the General Committee and its branches will be final, and they will not be subjected to the criticism and sanction of the Commissioners in meeting. The result will inevitably be a perpetual state of warfare between the Corporation and its Executive, which will materially retard the progress of business. It is a curious anomaly that the local Government should select as their agents not the persons who have developed all the features of strong political life which, properly guided, governed, and controlled, might be directed to the best results, but have committed the vital interests of the rate-payers to a class which has never shown any interest in local affairs or any desire to exercise the constitutional privileges they already possess, and which has no community of material interest or sentiment with the people they are to govern. The power of confirming and criticising the proceedings of the committees cannot be

safely taken from the Commissioners in the manner proposed in the Municipal Bill, because it is necessary to their dignity and political activity that it should be maintained ; they have never exercised powers to control or reverse the proceedings of their sub-committees, except under exceptional circumstances, and as a rule they support their committees. The power of criticism is always useful. The Corporation must be trusted to use these powers with dignity, discretion and moderation, and the opposition to these clauses will greatly retard the passing of the Bill; and the practical results of forcing it on the Corporation are not commensurate with this opposition, which is founded on the best precedents of Local Self-Government. Small committees are no doubt best for executive purposes, but the drawback attached to them is that in time they work into the hands of cliques and parties, and the freest powers of debate and inquiry must be vested in the Corporation to check this tendency. The transactions of the Corporation amount to an annual expenditure which may shortly extend to a million sterling per annum, and there are probably very few committees which will not prefer to act in matters entailing such heavy responsibility without the advice and concurrence of the Commissioners at large, and if they do, there are obvious objections to entrusting serious unrestricted financial responsibilities to small committees. Having carefully watched the working of the Corporation for many years, we are in a position to say that the vote of the Commissioners in meetings is always a fair one, but that we have not the same confidence in sub-committees.

Under section 64 of the Municipal Law as it stands, the General Committee is intended to be purely a budgetting and finance Committee, and its functions in this respect could be carried out in monthly meetings to frame budgets and sanction reappropriations ; it has also power to deal with all questions not specifically referred to other committees.

Good Municipal administration requires not a General Committee of twelve members, but about twelve committees, each consisting of 7 or 8 members to manage the most important branches of the administration, and all classes of the Corporation should be represented on these committees, and no Commissioner should be a member of more than two committees.

What has happened is that, owing to defective administration, all the work of the Corporation has practically devolved on the General Committee, which is not able to deal with the mass of business piled on it, and the administration of the Corporation has fallen on a few able and experienced, almost permanent, members of this committee.

The Administrative Committees should elect their own Chairmen and the Finance Committee should consist of these Chairmen who are presumably best acquainted with the financial requirements of their departments, with five or six members appointed by the Corporation. There are a sufficient number of able men on the Corporation well qualified to act as Chairman, and frequent changes in the office of an official Chairman have made this change desirable to preserve continuity of administration. The present office of Chairman should be altered into a Commissioner appointed by Government to be head of the executive, and whose duty it would be chiefly to place questions before the Corporation and its Committees clearly and forcibly in printed notes. A procedure will also have to be provided in the new Act giving the executive power to bring any question before the Corporation in meeting when Committees make default and do not meet. Powers are also necessary to strike off the names of members of the Corporation who do not attend at least two-thirds of the meetings of the Corporation and its Committees which they are required to attend.

In discussing the best form of representative government for Calcutta, it is necessary to remember that the population is heterogeneous and the interests to be dealt with of a very varied character. You have all nationalities represented in a population which at the present time does not fall far short of three-quarter of a million on an area of 11,850 acres. You have an European quarter, a business quarter, and a purely native quarter, and you have a suburban quarter rising in importance with leaps and bounds; and it is at least doubtful whether such mixed interests and personalities can be dealt with by any single elected body.

Mr. Chamberlain, who is perhaps one of the best authorities on Municipal Administration in England, has said that no Town with more than 500,000 inhabitants can be

justly governed by a single Municipality, and Calcutta is therefore not suited to a system which exposes the local affairs of Watgunge and the suburbs, for instance to be dealt with by the snatch votes of members from the Northern division who know absolutely nothing of their requirements.

The present system has produced the following anomalies, which are based on the statements for 1896 contained in my note, dated the 14th January, 1897 :—

	Annual valuation for assessment.	Area, acres.	Population.	Population per acre.	Incidence of taxation per head.
1	2	3	4	5	6
	Rs.				
Town ..	1,63,68,696	3,766	466,460	116	6'7
Docks and Jails ..	12,25,929	.....	....	....	....
Suburbs ..	26,68,071	8,084	215,100	26	2'37
Total ..	2,02,62,696	11,850	681,560	....	5'3

Ward.	Assessment.	Area, acres.	Population.	Population per acre.	Incidence of taxation on property on Census population.
1	2	3	4	5	6
	Rs.				
5 .. ..	14,79,081	243	39,180	161	7'2
6 .. ..	9,66,547	262	41,657	159	4'5
7 .. ..	24,98,422	217	20,646	95	23'2
8 .. ..	11,59,759	224	50,781	204	4'3
9 .. ..	9,48,524	263	39,109	148	4'6
12 .. ..	20,47,614	211	6,063	27	65'0 Business quarter.
13 .. ..	9,77,914	192	28,366	147	7'9 Residential.
Total	1,00,77,861	1,612	225,822	140	8'7

It will be seen that Ward 7 contributes to the Municipal revenue nearly as much as the whole of the seven wards in the suburbs together, and half the whole revenue of the town is paid by one-seventh of the total area and little more than one-fourth of the population.

Nothing has been done to the central division of the town in the way of substantial improvement since the construc-

tion of the Harrison Road, and this is no doubt due to the insufficient representation of that rich and important area. It is suggested that the following divisions of the town and suburbs into four districts gives what is approximately four zones of similar interests :—

	Area in acres.	Population.	Annual taxes paid on property.	Representa- tion by elected Commission- ers at present.
1	2	3	4	5
DIVISION No. 1— Wards 1 to 4 and 6 ... ..	1,337	152,346	Rs. 7,18,052	10
DIVISION No. 2— Wards 5, 7 to 9, 12 and 13 ... ..	1,350	184,125	17,51,396	12
DIVISION No. 3— Wards 10, 11, 14 to 18 ... ..	1,079	129,989	6,66,447	14
DIVISION No. 4— Wards 19 to 25 ... ..	8,064	215,100	5,09,140	14

It is perhaps a question for after consideration whether Ward 9 should not be made over to the third division, and whether Wards 19 and 20 should not also be added to it.

Having thus established zones of similar interests—

There are, then, four points necessary to consider in framing a good Act for the representative government of Calcutta. In the first place there must be a strong executive established, under provisions similar to those contained in the Bombay Act and with the same wholesome liabilities to criticism and the discussion of its proceedings by the Corporation.

Next, it is clear that there are two sorts of questions which will come before a Municipal Council—questions of detailed administration and the representation of local interests in which the special knowledge of local Commissioners is of great value ; and then there are those wider questions attached to affairs of magnitude and importance which not only require local representation but also the advice of men of experience in public affairs to shape the general policy of the city.

Lastly, there is the necessity of the exercise of the Government powers of control in keeping these bodies in the active exercise of their functions.

Taking, first, the case of what may be called District Councils for the administration of the four divisions suggested, they may consist of the elected members as they stand with the addition of some few nominated members, and they might elect their own Chairman, and they must work with the staff under the Commissioner. It would be the business of these local Councils to prepare a preliminary budget yearly for local requirements chargeable to revenue and loans funds and to submit it to the Calcutta Council, who would decide on the funds to be allotted to it for expenditure to enable it to perform efficiently the functions conferred on it by law, with due consideration to the requirements of the city at large and to the remarks of the Executive on the application. The Calcutta Council might consist of a member returned by the District Councils for each ward, whose appointment should hold good for three years, one-third of the number retiring annually. This would give 25 members appointed by the District Councils, and to these should be added 25 members nominated by Government and local bodies, the very best men of business and experience to be found in Calcutta. The Calcutta Central Council would thus consist of 50 members. It is evident that no smaller number would suffice, and that practically its affairs will have to be administered not by a General Committee of twelve, but by twelve Standing Committees working with powers conferred on them by bye-laws, but whose proceedings would require the confirmation of the Council in meeting, and it would have to meet at least once a fortnight or oftener, if necessary. The London County Council meets once a week but it enjoys long vacations.

The division of work between the Council and the District Councils would be clear and distinct and generally follow the lines adopted in London. The Standing Committees which would be necessary, indicate broadly the functions of the Central Council :—

1. Main roads of communication.
2. Main sewers.
3. Major town improvements.
4. Main water-supply of filtered and unfiltered water.

5. Gas works.
6. Electric lighting.
7. Tramways.
8. Building Act Committee.
9. Stores Committee.
10. Bye-laws Committee.
11. General Purposes Committee, including all applications and questions not included in the above list.
12. Finance-budgetting and Taxation Committee, including loans.

The Council and Committees should elect their own Chairman, and it is not expedient, as a rule, to have the Commissioner or any other executive officer as Chairman.

Should a Committee neglect to form a quorum within a given time, then a procedure should be adopted by which the Commissioner, acting with the Chairman of the Committee, should furnish a report to the Council without referring question again to the Committee. The plan of administration proposed in this paper is precisely that which has for many years been successful in London, and wherever it has been tried in England.

The reports of the London County Council contain elaborate statements of the division of work between the Central and District Councils, which are too long to reproduce in this paper and are of a very simple character. The Council provides for the main line of drains for the city, for example. The District Councils would provide for the drains required for the ward.

The Council deals with the main framework of roads for the circulation of trade in the town. The District Councils provide for secondary streets and their repair.

The Council prescribes bye-laws by which the District Council are bound and regulates the finance of the city, and under twenty-five heads of Municipal Administration a very complete distribution of work between the two authorities has been formulated and mutually agreed to. The District Councils would have the absolute disposal of their budget grant and independence in the exercise of their powers in matters not controlled by bye-laws.

A very intelligent body of Commissioners now manages suburban affairs in Calcutta. There is probably not one of the members, for instance, who cannot draw the chief



lines of road and drainage in his ward from memory, and who has not acquainted himself thoroughly with the requirements of conservancy and other establishments, and the Committee is probably the best in the Corporation.

The existing Town Improvement Committee is an example of what happens when the area represented is too large. The conflict of interests is so great that a practical conclusion is never arrived at; and, owing to the over-centralization of establishments and their weakness, local areas in the town are never properly represented and their claims put forward with the force and emphasis they require. The three lakhs provision in the present Act in favour of the suburbs no doubt has done something to advance the progress of the district, but it is owing quite as much to the energy and persistence of its local representatives. In the town proper the Commissioners take most interest in other than local affairs and nothing is done. The organization proposed in this note for very careful discussion and consideration is calculated to utilise to the utmost extent all that is best in local representation, and in all major matters the Central Council will have the advantage of contact with the best minds which Government can find to assist them and the best business capacity which the city can find to guide them.

The machinery is fully provided for in the English Acts for the appointment of County Councils, and if a strong Central Council is formed on the lines we have suggested, the appointment of the Improvement Trust suggested by the Building Commission would not be necessary. There is the further advantage that the plan is sufficiently elastic to include the whole of the waterworks and drainage area of Calcutta, which extends up to the latitude of Barrackpore, and it would give the existing riparian municipalities powers to get loan capital on the security of the Central Council. At present the boundaries of Calcutta are not conterminous with the drainage and waterworks area, and the anomaly already causes administrative inconvenience which is likely to become greater in the near future.

The Council should be trusted fully to exercise wholesome powers of inquiry, questioning and criticisms of the Executive with due discretion, and, with so large a proportion of nominated members, it is not probable that mistakes would often be made.

The success of the measure would still mainly depend on the activity of Government in exercising its large powers of control, inquiry, and direction.

As the schoolmaster is, so will be the school. A Government which attempts to do everything has been compared to a schoolmaster who does all his pupils' tasks for them ; he may be popular with his pupils, but he will teach them little. A Government, on the other hand, which neither does anything itself that can possibly be done by anyone else, nor shows anyone else how to do anything, has a school, from which high results are expected, in which there are no schoolmasters but only pupil teachers who have never themselves been taught.

The plan suggests concessions which will probably be accepted by public opinion and the Corporation, and the first point attached to it is that it proceeds on the strictly constitutional lines of the English County Council Act.

The Commissioners gain by it the power of electing their own Chairman, and on this point I have to say that, without local knowledge and experience, a good administrator is often a bad Chairman, and that the reform which draws a distinct line between the administration of the town and its executive is for many reasons desirable. It is a distinct advantage to have an unbiassed unofficial Chairman who can place questions before the Corporation impartially and fairly, and is not forced into a chronic attitude of defending his own administration.

In London the cases are so clearly placed before the meetings of Council in the printed reports of the Sub-Committees, that the duties of the Chair are almost nominal, and purely formal. Questions in Council are answered and explanations given by the twenty-seven Chairmen of Committees, who are practically the ministers responsible for the administration of the chief departments.

The Commissioners also gain all necessary powers and independence in the administration of purely local affairs. Government, on the other hand, gain the advantage of securing a strong executive, and the increased efficiency in the administration of the larger affairs of the town which may be expected from the introduction of 25 men of presumably great ability and standing into the Central Council.

If concessions of this character are accepted by both sides, and Government and the Corporation work heartily

together, the present tension will disappear, and in three months the Bill will be an accomplished fact; and if these proposals do not commend themselves to either party, they may at least be useful in leading the way to some better lines of reasonable compromise.

Throughout this paper prominence has been given to the necessity of inquiry, guidance, and direction to local bodies, but if this principle is accepted and taken with the sanitary state of Calcutta described in this paper, which is the direct consequence of past administrative neglect, it is evident that none of our local bodies require instruction and guidance in the methods of representative Government more than the Government of India itself, and that a Parliamentary inquiry into the results of Sanitary Control and Local Self-Government would be extremely valuable to the Government and the people of India.

The sanitary state of every Indian town and village of importance at the present day imperatively calls for such an inquiry in the interests of humanity and for the political and economical education of Indian Governments and the people committed to their care: nothing short of this inquiry will sufficiently emphasize the responsibilities of Governments in these matters and define the duties of the people to themselves.

The difficulties of dealing with the questions are admittedly very great but not insuperable, and whatever they are they must be faced and overcome. In the climate of India poverty loses half the effect on the death-rate it has in Europe; on the other hand, breaches of sanitary law are followed by more swift and certain punishment than in temperate climates, and the inertia of Government in a rich field which mainly depends on the methods of Government for its development appears to be the most serious preliminary difficulty which requires removal.

In the city of Calcutta, at least, the neglect of the self-imposed and legally constituted duties of Government control has cost the city many thousands of valuable lives in the past, and produced a state of things which will require a quarter of a century of persistent effort, and an expenditure of many crores of rupees to remedy in the future.

A. J. HUGHES, M. INST. C. E.

*The 19th December, 1898.*