THE FIRST P. R. ELECTION IN NEW ENGLAND

BY CHRISTOPHER M. GALLUP

Member West Hartford Charter Commission

Proportional representation brought a lot of new blood into the town government. The party machine was disappointed, but the people are satisfied. :: :: :: :: :: :: ::

WEST HARTFORD, a residential suburb of Connecticut's capital city, used proportional representation based on the single transferable ballot, for the first election under its new council-manager charter. Seventy-seven per cent of the ballots cast were counted for the successful candidates, and only $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent were thrown out as invalid. The results of the election vindicated every claim put forward by the local sponsors of P. R.

For some years back West Hartford had been a political experiment station for the old Nutmeg State, being the first town to adopt the budget system, a town plan commission to control real estate subdivisions, the unit system of realty appraisal, and a salaried substitute for the board of selectmen. The mushroom growth during the World War, however, precipitated a financial crisis, necessitated a big jump in the tax rate, and developed public opinion to sustain a general municipal reorganization. This was accomplished by the appointment of a charter commission in accordance with the provisions of the home rule law.

The commission spent several months studying the various methods for eliminating the party labels from municipal elections, and finally concluded that the single transferable ballot offered all the advantages of alternative systems, and, in addition, a better attainment of American ideals of representative government. The only

drawback was the general unfamiliarity with the system. Instead of incorporating P. R. in the charter, therefore, the commission reserved the right to formulate the rules and regulations for the first election, delegating to the council similar control over subsequent elections. Dummy elections under the Hare system were conducted by the charter commission at their various hearings, but the voters generally took very little interest until sample ballots were mailed to all registered electors one week before the election.

The mistake was made of failing to have the rules for counting accompany the sample ballots, and there was more or less hue and cry that the charter commission had put something over. There is no local newspaper, and both Hartford dailies, being strong partisan and organization sheets, "knocked" the Hare system heartily. Secretary Hoag of the P. R. League came to school the election officials, and tried to get some explanatory matter printed, but in vain. The stage setting for the first P. R. election in New England was not any too favorable.

THIRTY-TWO CANDIDATES ENTERED:
FIFTEEN ELECTED

Thirty-two candidates filed nominating petitions, there being fifteen councilmen to be elected. For the convenience of the voters, the town was divided into four districts, and the

councilmen apportioned according to the registration. In the first district, ten candidates contested five seats; in the second, three candidates one seat; in the third, eleven candidates four seats; and in the fourth, eight candidates five seats. The campaign was quiet, with no clean-cut issues outstanding, and was entirely free from anything savoring of "mud-slinging" or personal abuse of candidates.

Sixteen hundred and seventy-nine votes were polled on election day, practically 50 per cent of the registration. As stated above, only $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent of the ballots were thrown out as invalid, and 77 per cent were actually counted for the successful candidates. The polls closed at five o'clock, and the final results in every district were known by eight. Fifty men and women took part in the sorting and counting of the ballots, and the entire process was carried through in each district with precision and dispatch.

The representative character of the

council can best be indicated by enumerating the occupations of the various members which are: dairymen (2), tobacco grower, insurance company officer, florist, salesman (traveling), plumber, factory superintendent, typewriter assembler, restaurant broker, insurance clerk, wholesale grocer, newspaperman, carpenter and lawyer.

Only four members of the council are men who have been active in town affairs under the old system. At the last presidential election Harding beat Cox by about three to one, yet the Republican organization landed only six of their men. Naturally the party hacks are still "knocking" P. R., but the people generally seem satisfied with their representation on the board now entrusted with all of the corporate powers of the municipality. The council still has about eight months in which to enact the ordinance governing the next election, and meanwhile will hold public hearings to ascertain the wishes of the voters with reference to continuing the use of P. R.

OHIO LEGISLATURE DENIES RELIEF TO INSOLVENT CITIES

BY WILLIAM M. THOMAS

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The Smith law bends but does not break. Property classification was defeated so income tax was not pushed. :: :: :: :: ::

WHILE the Ohio legislators were packing their bags, prior to departure for their homes, after confessing their inability to arrive at a definite solution of the "tax tangle," there appeared a small news item in the Columbus papers:

LODGES HELP CITY

DELAWARE, May 18.—Delaware lodges have come to the financial aid of

the city. Three secret societies have made loans to the city during the past week to tide it over till September.

Rather a singular procedure, perhaps without parallel; but Delaware is not the only Ohio community hard hit by the financial drought.

Even as big and wealthy as the city of Cincinnati is, her officials were compelled to appear before legislature