

STATE BOARDS OF CONTROL, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE EXPERIENCE OF WISCONSIN.

The recent development of administration in the United States affords abundant evidence of a tendency towards centralization. This centralization may be considered as a phase of the general tendency towards combination and organization in industry which has characterized the closing decades of the last century. The rapidly increasing number of state offices and boards bears witness to this movement to enlarge the sphere of our commonwealth administrations. But in addition to the extension of central authority recent legislation has strengthened the control and supervision exercised by the educational, public works, police, charitable, correctional and other departments of the state over the work of the localities in the interest of uniform and economic methods of administration. It is probable that no other phase of the administrative systems of our states has been so unsatisfactorily organized as that of our charitable and correctional institutions. In order to correct loose and irresponsible methods in this department there has been a noticeable increase in the number of central responsible boards in the states. In 1899 there were operating in thirty states charitable and correctional boards exercising varying degrees of control over the state and local institutions. In certain of these states, as Minnesota and Texas, the control of the state board extends only to a few of the state institutions; while complete centralization and concentration of power has taken place in but seven of the thirty states, viz., Kansas, Rhode Island, Arkansas, South Dakota, Wyoming, Iowa and Wisconsin.

The rise of the state boards of charity and correction has been a gradual one, beginning during the period of the Civil War. From the time of their origin, these boards have

been subjected to the passing whims of changing legislatures. Their powers and organization have been frequently altered, and often the original boards have been subdivided. An increasing population and the growth of humanitarian sentiment have resulted in a rapid increase in the number of state institutions for the care of the unfortunate and the reform of the unsocial members of the community. The growth of interest in this field of work has demanded not only more careful attention to its scientific phases, but also better business methods. Hence this movement toward centralization, which has not been confined to any one section of the country, but which has reached a more advanced stage of development in the newer and more progressive states of the West.

The boards of charity and reform, as they are now organized in the various states, may be grouped into two classes: the first have the powers of supervision, inspection and recommendation, but leave the business management of each institution to a local board of trustees; the second exercise a positive control over the state institutions and assume full responsibility for their management, and also exercise a control over the localities in certain phases of their charitable and reformatory work. Boards of the first class are usually composed of honorary officers who give but a portion of their time to the work without pay; while the members of the second class or executive boards devote their whole time to the work and receive salaries commensurate with the responsibilities which they assume. In some of the states, as in New York, the system of administration combines both the professional state board, and the honorary local board of trustees. This, however, only extends to the care of the insane.

There exists a divided opinion among those engaged in charitable and correctional work concerning the practical merits of these two systems. In passing judgment upon them a careful distinction should be observed between

sentimental and scientific charity. The dominance of the first idea in the early years of charity organization led to the prevalence of "sentimental boards," engaged in both state and local charitable work. The growth of the second idea is in response to a more enlightened humanitarian spirit, which recognizes that public and private charity demands the most careful business methods and the scientific treatment of the questions of reform which come under the jurisdiction of the authorities. There is consequently involved in the choice of a system the question as to whether the executive board is in a better position to follow out scientific principles than the board which possesses only supervisory powers. A full discussion of these questions must be in the light of experience, and not merely through the collation of opinion. It must also be borne in mind that careful business and scientific methods under ample authority have been so recent that a comparison of the executive and supervisory systems is in a sense premature.

Among the state boards of charity and reform which have combatted the tendency towards centralization, the state board of Illinois has been especially conspicuous. It has been an open advocate, through its reports, of a supervisory state board with local boards of trustees in charge of each institution. These reports may be selected to defend the merits of this system. Sentiment has favored the retention of the advisory board, on the ground that "the essential principles of thorough and effective organization are the division of labor, accountability, and the spirit of emulation." It is urged that these are secured under the advisory board by committing to the local boards the care and responsibility for the many different state institutions.

A perusal of the reports of the Illinois state board reveals many complaints which suggest the need of a larger authority for the state board, and particularly in the treatment of the insane by the county authorities. The board complains of political influences in appointments, and doubt-

less could urge with equal reason the support of thrifty lobbyists by each institution at the legislative sessions in order to procure appropriations for their respective institutions. At least this practice has been quite general in those states employing the system of local trusteeships. One of the most urgent reasons for the creation of the state board of control, in Wisconsin, was the wasteful competition for appropriations between the trustees of the various state institutions, in their efforts to secure favorable appropriations. The institutions were constantly lobbying against each other, and the most liberal appropriations were secured by those who clamored with tact and influence, even, often, in opposition to the advice of the supervisory board. It is not at all improbable that similar practices prevail in other states where the state board possesses only supervisory and visitatorial powers. Viewed as a business proposition, the careless and unsystematic methods of the local boards of trustees have led to wasteful expenditures, which have shown these boards to be deficient if not dishonest. Among the members of these local boards, it must be admitted, will be found men of earnest philanthropic purpose, as well as of thorough business training, but they are not in a position to give to the public the full value of their observation and experience, since only a portion of their time is devoted to their work. In addition, the limited business field prevents the utilization of the advantages of the market in purchasing supplies. And still further, these boards are compelled to combat the strong feeling that the trade of a particular institution exists for the business men of the locality in which it is situated. But the strongest argument which can be urged against the supervisory system is given in a forthcoming report of the Illinois state board. This report contains an admission on the part of the board of the failure of the supervisory system, and strongly recommends the substitution of a board of control. The merits of the two systems will further appear as we follow the evolution of the board of control in the State of

Wisconsin, which has passed through the different stages of development through which the boards of other states are now passing.

The history of the state charitable and correctional institutions of Wisconsin may be conveniently divided into four periods: First, from the establishment of the first institutions to the year 1871, a period when the different institutions were under the management of local boards of trustees, without any supervising state authority; second, from 1871 to 1881, during which time the boards of trustees still managed the different institutions, but did so under the general direction of a State Board of Charities and Reform, which was created with powers of an advisory nature; third, the period from 1881 to 1891, marked by the creation of the State Board of Supervision of the charitable and reformatory institutions, which divided responsibilities with the previous board, but did not destroy it; and finally, the fourth period, since 1891, characterized by the creation of a State Board of Control of reformatory, charitable and penal institutions, which supplanted the two boards of the third period, and under whose management were centralized all of the charitable and correctional institutions belonging to the state.

During the first two periods, covering about thirty years, the local boards were appointed by the governor, for a term of three to five years, the members retiring on different years and receiving no salary. The state board of charities and reform was created in 1871, to the end that the administration of public charity and correction might be "conducted upon sound principles of economy, justice and humanity," and that the relations existing between the state and its dependent and criminal classes might become better understood. The board was composed of five members, who retired on different years, and who held two annual sessions. The duties of the board were to investigate and supervise all charitable and correctional institutions supported by the state, or receiving aid from the state treasury.

The members of the board were expected to make personal visits to the different institutions in order to gather information concerning the efficiency, honesty and economy of their administration, and to recommend such changes as might be deemed essential to their improvement. The board was also directed to conduct an investigation into the conditions of the poorhouses, jails, prisons, etc., of the state.

No one would deny that this was an ambitious and comprehensive program, and that the board, like similar boards in other states, was clothed with power of far-reaching recommendation. But for a summary of the results attained, the student should read the complaints of these boards of wasteful and extravagant expenditures, political influences and other factors which tended to retard development in charitable and correctional administration.

But these were the beginnings in a Western state where crude conditions still prevailed. While the state board could severely reprimand and amply recommend, it possessed no power to compel action. It could condemn the jails and police stations on sanitary grounds, but its suggestions went unheeded from year to year. The most favorable word that can be said with reference to the success of this board is that it was merely nominal. The objections that were urged above against honorary boards, applied to the Wisconsin system of this period. The local boards neglected their opportunities and generally practiced wasteful financial methods. Insufficient time was given to the work, and often incapable management was found. The inspections of the state board usually took the form of friendly calls at superintendents' offices, or upon members of the local boards. The inherent weakness of this system appears in many cases which might be cited showing that irregular and unbusinesslike methods were widely practiced by the officers of the various institutions. Deficits for unauthorized appropriations, false classifications in the pay roll, doubling of the weight of groceries and supplies, were among the

most common practices. These irregularities were made public in the special report of 1880, and led to the creation of the State Board of Supervision with larger powers of control. The success of this legislation was impaired by the fact that the two state boards possessed conflicting powers. The obvious intention of the legislature was to substitute a more centralized authority for the loosely constituted boards created in 1871. The members of the board of supervision were expected to devote their whole time to their work, for which they received a salary of two thousand dollars and expenses. In order to carry out this arrangement a permanent office was provided and placed in charge of a secretary, who also gave to his duties his whole time and attention.

The most important change made by the act of 1881 was the abolition of the local boards of trustees and the introduction of the simple and uniform methods of administration, which were now possible. In the place of the local board a superintendent or warden was given immediate charge of an institution and was made personally responsible to the State board for its management. The control of the board over each institution was strengthened not only by the abolition of the local boards of trustees, but also by the more detailed and strict accounting required of the head of each institution and by the examination of the local accounts. While this was doubtless a step in the right direction it tended to place great power in the hands of each superintendent. He was the purchaser of all supplies and naturally fell a prey to local conditions, and practices were gradually developed which destroyed efficient and economical administration.

With this dual system of state supervision in operation, it was not long before jealousy and conflict arose over questions of jurisdiction. It was largely due to this condition of affairs that the two boards were abolished in 1891 and the State Board of Control established in their place. At the time of its creation the board consisted of six members, but by the act of 1895, this number was reduced to five. The

members are appointed by the governor of the state, one retiring each year, and receive salaries of two thousand dollars and expenses. The purpose of the act of 1891 was to follow out the centralizing tendencies of the act of 1881, which created the board of supervision and destroyed the local boards of trustees. Thus, step by step, this centralization has gone on in Wisconsin until the state has taken a most advanced position among the states of the Union as regards the administration of its charitable and correctional institutions.

The institutions coming directly or indirectly under the State Board of Control of Charitable, Reformatory, and Penal Institutions, are divided into two classes, the state institutions and the semi-state institutions. The institutions of the first class are the State Hospital for the Insane, the Northern Hospital for the Insane, the School for the Deaf, the School for the Blind, the Industrial School for Boys, the State Prison, the State Public School for Dependent Children, the Home for the Feeble Minded, and the State Reformatory. The institutions which compose the second class are the twenty-seven county insane asylums, the Milwaukee County Hospital for Insane, the Industrial School for Girls, and the Wisconsin Veterans' Home.

A statement of the general powers of the board will aid to a clearer idea of the results of its administration. In the first place, it is charged with the maintenance, government, and direct management and supervision of the various state institutions. It must preserve and care for and make annually a full and complete inventory and appraisal of the property of each institution. The members must make monthly visits to each institution, and provide all needful regulations for the officers and employees, courses of study, tuition and maintenance of pupils. In short, all administrative matters pertaining to the state institutions fall within the jurisdiction of the board.

These powers are sufficiently ample to afford the board

an opportunity to develop a policy of charity and reform on broad and liberal lines. In some regards the board is pursuing a policy which was begun under the Board of Supervision, but in other respects it is breaking new ground, particularly in the care of the insane and the direct, unified management of the affairs of the different institutions. The members of the board are in constant attendance upon their duties and consequently bring to bear upon the problem under consideration a wide fund of observation and experience. Naturally a large and complicated business, with its legal and technical phases, has developed certain forms of specialized effort, which affords an opportunity for each member of the board to employ his peculiar talents to the best advantage.

A brief examination of some of the specific problems with which the board must daily grapple will convey a more definite idea of its policy. In view of what has been said concerning political influences at work in controlling the patronage of the state institutions under the supervisory system, an account of the working of the Wisconsin plan in this regard will be valuable. It was the former practice in this state to disregard in great measure the fitness of candidates for positions, and to select political friends and relatives for responsible places. In recent years there has been a gradual elimination of political considerations in the appointments made by the board. The constant growth in the number of offices has demanded a more careful selection of persons for responsible positions. An examination of the table on page 87 shows that the institutions are managed and operated at present by 632 officers and employees, receiving monthly salaries of about \$21,062, which places an important patronage directly or indirectly at the disposal of the board. In order to fix responsibility more definitely, the Board of Control has recently decided that future appointments will be made by the superintendents and wardens of the various institutions. Formerly the appointments were

made without consulting these officers, who were legally responsible to the board for the success or failure of their work. In future the superintendents and wardens of institutions are to make all nominations, subject to the approval of the board, and in addition these officers are to have power to suspend, and in some cases to remove, inefficient and rebellious officers and employees. In this manner they are made responsible for the success or failure of their institutions. This is a logical solution of a problem of great difficulty under prevailing political conditions, and must have salutary results. It practically frees the Wisconsin system from the abuses of partisanship, which is a pronounced step in advance.

In connection with the appointments of the board the question of salaries of officials and employees has come up for readjustment. Under the régime of the local boards the law was usually silent as to salaries, with the result that no general rule was followed. During the administration of the Board of Supervision the legislature fixed a maximum salary, leaving to the board the power to determine the amount within this limit. Under the sanction of this law the board reduced the number of offices and fixed the compensation in accordance with the nature and importance of official duties. This principle has been steadily adhered to with good results, both as to economy and quality of service.

The act of 1891 conferred upon the board powers of a wide scope, which it has been slow to assume. The former practice was to leave the business management and the purchase of supplies to the local authorities of each institution. This system made each institution the prey of the business men and supply houses of the locality, and of the political party in power. There was little or no competition in the purchase of supplies. The old supervisory board laid the foundations for this unbusiness-like practice in Wisconsin as in other states. It was helpless to remedy the abuses which were patent to any observing member of the board. The

popular idea had become firmly rooted, that each institution existed for the benefit of the business interests of the particular locality, or of the state at large when the local market could not supply the needed article. These two prejudices had to be overcome before the taxpayers of the state could secure the advantages of competitive prices for supplies. Not only must the principle of competition be extended beyond the locality in which each institution is located, but the market must be thrown open to all bidders. It was not until 1898 that the Wisconsin board took up these questions in a serious way, and from its action resulted a new policy, according to which the board now assumes full responsibility for the purchase of staple supplies, and the general administration of all state institutions. The Board of Control in Iowa inaugurated a similar policy about the same time.

The cost of supplies had grown so rapidly that it became necessary to exercise greater care in their purchase. The total revenue of the Board of Control for the present biennial term is \$1,299,238, which indicates roughly the volume of business controlled by the board, as well as the responsibility which it must assume. In order to determine whether efficiency and economy characterize the management of these public institutions, the same rules must be applied as to the management of a private business. The question must be answered in the light of business experience. In the first place, the same saving has doubtless attended the centralization of the business under the Board of Control which is usually attributed to large combinations in the private business world. If this leads to efficiency and economy in private business, it should prove equally effective in public business. If the Board of Control is enabled to develop more efficient business methods and to realize for the state a great saving by open competition in the metropolitan markets, its work should command the respect at least of the taxpayer.

Those supplies to which the greatest attention is given

by the board in Wisconsin are of course the staple articles. The purchase of these articles requires a close study of the markets, and the greatest care in the selection of the stock in order to prevent adulterations. Naturally the value of any system of purchasing depends upon the business skill and capacity of the parties to the bargain. The method of purchasing coal, flour, meat, groceries, soap, toilet paper and mechanical appliances is essentially the same, and may be briefly outlined. By the purchase of large quantities, bids become close and the difference often lies in the quality of the article. The contract system is used, and in order to get the advantage of changes in price, the board fixes the length of the contract period at about three months for most articles. It also makes special purchases by lot without competition. In the competition for some of the articles, as groceries, the board prefers the firms of the state, but in the purchase of meats the Chicago firms are the lowest bidders and are preferred. The bids are offered under sealed proposals. There must accompany each bid ten samples, one to be retained at the central office of the board, and the others to be sent to each institution for which the supply is purchased. Upon the receipt of the goods the superintendent must return samples to the office of the board and carefully examine all supplies with reference to the contract specifications. In this manner the quality of the supplies has been improved and adulterations avoided. It not infrequently happens that goods are rejected upon the advice of the state chemist.

This policy of purchasing supplies was developed without any specific legislation and naturally created much opposition on the part of local and state supply firms, but the Board of Control very properly held that the taxpayers of the state should receive first consideration, and that the state could not donate to a few business men the surplus above the price in the cheapest market. The board has preferred the business men of the state in so far as it could do so in justice to the taxpayers. The saving to the state is

the best answer to adverse criticism. A comparison of the biennial expenditures of the board since the inauguration of the new policy, with that of the previous fiscal period, shows an average biennial saving of \$121,183.15, which represents roughly the efficiency of the business methods employed by the Board of Control since 1897. The *per capita* cost of all the institutions since 1897 has been materially decreased, as is shown by the table on page 87. But these statistics represent only a part of the saving realized. They do not show the permanent improvements effected through the expenditure of the surplus saved from sustenance. Many thousands of dollars have thus been expended without the necessity of special appropriations. The buildings have been modernized, the grounds beautified, and the standard of living raised.

The method employed has eliminated the possibility of fraud through an elaborate system of checks. The system of bookkeeping is most effective, and has been adopted by other states. The itemization has been carried out in every possible detail, and through periodic reports from the superintendent of each institution the daily and weekly progress is recorded. No funds are received or paid out by the officers in charge, except on warrants by the board save in a few minor cases of produce from the farms; and recently steps have been taken to secure a more careful classification of the resources of each institution, in order to get a clearer idea of the cost of maintenance.

We now turn to another phase of the policy of the Wisconsin Board of Control, which has given it a unique place in the history of charity administration in this country, and even in Europe. It is the practice of other states to care for the insane in state institutions alone. In Wisconsin the Board of Control not only directs the administration of the state institutions, but also has been given a large control over the affairs of the locality in certain phases of its activity. The first step in the development of this central control lies in

NAME OF INSTITUTION.	Number of Inmates, October, 1900.	Number of Officers and Employees, October, 1900.	Total.	Pay Roll for Sep- tember, 1900.	Per Capita Cost Per Week, 1897.	Per Capita Cost Per Week, 1898.	Per Capita Cost Per Week, 1899.	Per Capita Cost Per Week, 1900.
State Hospital for the Insane	424	122	546	\$3,414 16	\$5 38	\$5 18	\$5 04	\$4 79
Northern Hospital for the Insane	585	169	754	4,201 99	4 75	5 09	4 18	3 89
School for the Deaf	190	46	236	2,110 87	6 48	6 09	4 66	5 26
School for the Blind	105	44	149	1,231 96	7 94	7 27	7 40	7 61
Industrial School for Boys	328	54	382	2,085 66	3 54	5 75	4 16	3 62
State Prison	496	47	543	2,481 17	2 89	2 91	3 01	3 09
State Public School	147	45	192	1,608 47	3 51	4 63	4 87	4 94
Home for Feeble-Minded	394	84	478	2,756 17	7 08	3 77	3 18	3 10
State Reformatory	115	21	136	1,171 17	. . .	. . .	. . .	. . .
Total or average	2,784	632	3,416	\$21,061 62				
Average . . . . .	. . .	. . .	. . .	. . . . .	\$5 20	\$5 09	\$4 56	\$4 54

the power of the board to condemn jails, poorhouses, prisons and lockups on sanitary grounds. The board has been compelled to employ this power in only a few instances, as usually the municipality has corrected abuses without resort to drastic measures.

The second and most important step, known as the Wisconsin System, applies to the care of the chronic insane. The state supports two insane hospitals which are inadequate for the care of all of the insane of the state. The difficulty of caring for the acute and chronic cases in the same institution gradually developed a dual system for the separation of the two classes of patients. As a result the Board of Control inaugurated, in 1881, the policy of selecting the county asylums for the care of the chronic insane. At present there are in the state twenty-seven county asylums which are selected for this purpose and which are known as semi-state institutions.

The most important advantages of the Wisconsin system for the treatment of the chronic insane are economy, homelike surroundings for the patient, elasticity and effective state control. The economy secured by this system is apparent upon consideration of the fact that these hospitals are placed upon local farms of 100 to 500 acres each. The average cost *per capita* per week in the county hospitals in 1898 was \$1.60, for actual money expended, while the average cost for the two state hospitals was \$5.58 for the same period, which included all items of expense. The low *per capita* cost for the local institutions is due to the fact that the patients are largely self-supporting and not to any lowering of the scale of living. The whole cost of the insane is materially reduced by the fact that about two-thirds of the total number of the patients of the state belong to the chronic class and are cared for in the county institutions.

The Wisconsin system of dispersion which provides for the patient homelike influences by placing the hospitals on

separate farms, has much to commend it. The patients are permitted larger freedom, and consequently do not feel the restraints of close confinement. Great effort has been made to provide amusements and a free home life, which has given splendid results.

The system is also exceedingly elastic. The Board of Control selects those counties for the care of the chronic insane with reference to the standard maintained by the county authorities. It has full and final power to prevent the construction of new county asylums in advance of the need of such institutions. The policy of the board is to select those counties which have the largest number of insane in other county hospitals. The annual increase of the insane population of the state is about $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent, and by this expansive system all future needs can be provided for as they arise. It will obviously be long before all of the seventy counties of the state are permitted to construct their hospitals; but as a result of the working of this system there are in the state no insane who are necessarily retained in a prison, poorhouse, private asylum, or family. For the care of each chronic patient the state fixes a rate of three dollars per week, one-half of which it pays, and leaves to the county from which the patient comes the additional cost, with a small remittance for clothing. All financial matters are adjusted between the counties through the Board of Control. No moneys pass directly between the board and the county authorities, but all adjustments are made upon the tax books of the state treasury, by adding or deducting the amounts upon the accounts of the counties concerned.

The final and most important advantage of the Wisconsin system is the strong control exercised by the board over the county asylums and poorhouses without destroying the responsibility of the county authorities in the management of their institutions. It establishes this control by a very simple but effective arrangement. By advancing to each county institution one-half of the support of the chronic

patients the Board of Control is enabled to fix a certain standard of efficiency before the county hospital will be selected for such purposes. This also incites a wholesome rivalry among the local authorities. The county asylums are, properly speaking, local institutions, but the Board of Control is in a position to encourage, in a direct manner, uniform and better methods of administration by reason of its power to select those county hospitals which shall care for the chronic insane of other counties, and to withdraw state aid in case the standard of efficiency shall fall below a point which the board feels to be dangerous to the welfare of the patient. Recently the board has taken steps to introduce certain uniform requirements applying to the government of the semi-state institutions, on the ground that the state has a direct interest in each patient by reason of the fact that it provides one-half of his support. The local authorities have received this suggestion in the spirit in which it was intended. In order to carry out this policy there have been issued from time to time circular letters prescribing uniform methods of administration for the county institutions. These do not take the form of mere requests, but have back of them the authority of law. By way of illustration, there was issued on April 5, 1900, a circular to all of the local institutions requiring the selection of medical attendants on the basis of fitness rather than on that of cheapness.

The board is at present engaged in the solution of the prison contract labor question which is so unsatisfactorily solved in most of the states. Before it can enter upon an independent solution of this problem specific legislation will be required. The usual objections to the present contract system are urged by the business interests of the state, and in addition there is a strong feeling on the part of many that the present methods bring the inmates of the prison into too close a contact with the outside world. Specific recommendations will be made to the coming legislature, which will enable the board to solve the problem in the same comprehensive manner in which it has met similar questions.

A review of the administration of the charitable, correctional and penal institutions of Wisconsin under the direct management of one central authority must tend to strengthen the confidence of those states which are leading in the movement towards centralization, and inspire the hope that the system will in time supersede in all of the states the loose and irresponsible supervisory boards. It must be generally admitted that one central authority is capable of developing better and more economical business methods, and of securing a uniformity in the administration of all state institutions, which seems highly desirable. Wisconsin and Iowa have set an example of the direct management of state institutions by a central board and it seems probable that this method will prove as beneficial and effective in the department of public business as it has in the conduct of large private enterprises.

SAMUEL E. SPARLING.

University of Wisconsin.