

feel that, as far as possible, all action by the Municipal Government should be debated and voted upon in the City Council itself, or in one of its committees or sub-committees, that the Mayor should occupy the position of chairman of the Council, and that he should only act for the Council when empowered by them to do so and in accordance with the spirit of their decisions. Also that at all meetings of the Council and its committees, both Press and Public may be present to hear the debate and see the voting. It seems to me that only thus can the busy populace be kept closely informed as to the doings of their city government and induced to take a vital and constant interest in them.

In Milwaukee, as I gather is the case in many other American municipalities, the heads of the various departments (who are popularly elected) received their authority from the Mayor, the City Council acting as an advisory body, to whom reports on the work of Municipal departments were made from time to time, and who frequently did not even know of problems that had arisen, until after they had been disposed of – when of course they might criticise if they pleased. This system seems to me to concentrate too much power and responsibility in the hands of the Mayor, and to place him too much in the hands of the officials, for how can one man keep in touch with every detail of our complicated modern civic life? Moreover the system leaves the unofficial member of the Council with too little work and too little power.

This plan of relegating the City Council to the position of a mere advisory body is rather analogous to our British Parliamentary system than to that of our own local governing bodies. The heads of American Local Government Departments are, however, elected by popular vote, not appointed by the leader of the administration, like Cabinet Ministers. Moreover they are not members of the City Council, though they have very great administrative power.

It is now generally admitted that the British Cabinet system tends to make the Party machinery all-powerful and to crush out the initiative of the private Member. For this reason many of those who have had experience of the working of the larger English County and Town Councils, as well as of Parliament itself, wish to bring the Parliamentary system more into line with that of the Municipalities.

The American Local Government method of electing the heads of departments by popular vote, seems to me very much better than to allow the Prime Minister to choose his colleagues. Our Cabinet Ministers usually obtain their places by reason of their value as party

men.\* Generous donations to party funds, loyalty to the party machine, or leadership of a faction which the Prime Minister wishes to draw to his standard, together with a good platform manner, are the qualifications most likely to secure Cabinet rank in this country.

Though, as is the case in America, Party feeling would still undoubtedly exercise great influence in the election of British Ministers for a long time to come, it is quite certain that candidates standing for popular election to headships of Government Departments would be obliged to show some special qualifications for the office and some technical knowledge of the work. A change in the personnel, if not always in the politics, of Cabinet Ministers would immediately result, and non-party men who were recognized experts in various fields would begin to occupy Cabinet posts. If, for instance, the Presidency of the Local Government Board were to be thrown open to popular election, I think there is no doubt that Mr Sidney Webb (or Mrs Webb, if women were eligible) would receive the votes of the majority of the people of this country.<sup>†</sup> But Mr Sidney Webb is not a party man and so we have in that office Mr John Burns,<sup>‡</sup>

\* [SP] This appears to be less true of American Cabinet Ministers, though they are chosen by the President of the United States and not by popular vote, because they act merely as heads of the various departments, are not members of the legislative assembly, and have no power to dictate the legislative programme, as our Cabinet Ministers have. I am sure those of them who really desire reforms must often wish that they had the power of the popular vote behind them.

† Sidney Webb (1859–1947) and Beatrice Webb, née Potter (1858–1943), were early members of the Fabian Society and founders of the London School of Economics. From 1905 to 1909, Beatrice Webb headed the Minority Report to the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws. The report, to which Sidney Webb also contributed, emphasised the structural causes of poverty and advocated increased state provision. This took place in close proximity to the London suffragettes: The National Committee to Promote the Break-Up of the Poor Law, which published the report, was based at 5–6 Clement's Inn while the WSPU was at number 4. Although rejected by the Royal Commission in favour of the more conservative Majority Report, it was widely influential and seen as one of the intellectual precursors of the welfare state. Sidney Webb would later hold Cabinet posts in the Labour governments of 1924 and 1929–31.

‡ John Burns (1858–1943) had formerly been a leading socialist. In 1886, he was tried and acquitted on charges of conspiracy and sedition for his part in a demonstration protesting against rising unemployment in the course of which windows of fashionable London clubs were smashed. On 13 November 1887, Burns joined a demonstration against government inaction over unemployment and repression in Ireland. The demonstration, which had been banned by the