

HOW NOT TO GET SELF-GOVERNMENT

EDITORIAL BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

THE methods pursued in imposing a charter upon the people of New York—it would be a rank absurdity to speak of the process as *granting* a charter to the people of New York—by those in power at Albany (unfortunately the events of the past session have made most men feel that this is merely a round-about way of saying, those in control of Tammany) give an almost ideal illustration of how not to act in the matter of self-government. There are many things this charter proposes to do which, in the judgment of good citizens, ought not to be done. For instance, it ought to be fundamental that the Mayor should not have power over the finances of the city, unchecked by the action of any other elective official. But the transfer of powers from the Comptroller's office to that of the Corporation Counsel, who is an appointee of the Mayor, brings about precisely this unchecked control by the Mayor. (Under stress of popular criticism, this provision, we are now informed, will probably be altered—which admirably illustrates the need of such criticism.) The provision

eliminating the power of supervision exercised by the State Civil Service Commission over the Municipal Civil Service Commission is almost certain to mean the elimination of all real effort to achieve the merit system in the appointment of those occupying the lesser positions in the municipal civil service; under the State Civil Service Commission there may have been shortcomings, but if so, this is certainly not the way to remedy them. The Board of Education has been reconstituted on principles which have been emphatically condemned by the best educators in all parts of the Union. Instead of being kept as a State function, education is practically made a city function, and the appointment of those who are to have charge of it is so arranged as to make it almost certain that sooner or later it will be treated as an appanage of the politicians. The Mayor is given power to hold up any franchise; a power which in New York City is of enormous consequence. The power of the Governor to remove the Mayor upon charges and after trial is taken away. Now, it is right that the

Mayor should have great power; but means should be provided for holding him strictly accountable for the exercise of the power. I very thoroughly believe in concentrating power in the hands of the executive, but the proposed charter does this to an extreme degree, and yet relieves him of responsibility for the way he exercises the power. It is to the last degree unwise to have the power over the finances left unchecked in the Mayor's hands. It is to the last degree unwise to make him a despot over the educational system of half the State of New York—for New York City contains half the population of the State. It is thoroughly unfortunate that no power should be lodged in the hands of the Governor whereby the Mayor can be called to account.

But, bad though the provisions of the charter are, the method of thrusting the charter upon the city is much worse. The change of wording in provision after provision is such as to make experts like those of the Bureau of Municipal Research wholly unable to tell just what is meant; for instance, it seems clear that the charter gives the Mayor power to destroy any public record whenever he sees fit. Those responsible for the charter published a summary which was wholly misleading; and only the popular demand frightened them into making the whole charter public far enough in advance of action to give a chance for popular discussion. Practically, if the Legislature, which is to meet at Albany next month, does as Tammany expects, the organic law under which five millions of people are to live will be imposed upon them without allowing them to take any real part in framing it, without giving them any adequate opportunity to express their opinion upon its infinitely varied, and sometimes obscurely set forth, provisions. A more undemocratic method of procedure could not be imagined. The citizens of New York have not asked for this charter. There has not been the slightest popular demand nor agitation for it. Arizona and New Mexico contain together not much more than one-tenth of the population of New York; yet they have drafted their own Constitutions, through their own representatives, whose debates were widely reported, and whose actions were finally passed upon by the

people of the Territories concerned, and were then, and not till then, submitted to Congress. The people of the city of New York, ten times more numerous, are not given anything even approaching the opportunities thus given Arizona and New Mexico to fix for themselves the fundamental law under which they are to live. They have had no choice, direct or indirect, as to the men who have framed this charter, and they have been in no way consulted as to its provisions. Finally, they are to have nothing to say as to whether they will accept or reject the charter that has been framed for them. Every principle of home rule is violated by such action, and it is to the last degree undemocratic and in violation of the fundamentals of popular government. Moreover, the proposed charter will give, by the action of outsiders, powers to one elective officer which that elective officer was not chosen to exercise, and at the same time will take from other elective officers powers which they were chosen to exercise. In 1909 certain men were elected to manage the municipal affairs of New York. All the men thus elected, except the Mayor, ran on the ticket opposed to that on which the victorious candidate for Mayor ran. All these men were elected to exercise certain well-defined functions, and were chosen to positions of certain well-defined powers. The election was the commission of the people of the city of New York to those officers to fulfill the functions and exercise the powers. Now, nearly two years after the election has taken place, a partisan Legislature steps in and says that the one officer who was elected on a partisan ticket—its own ticket, the Tammany ticket—shall have his powers greatly increased, and that the other officers elected on the other ticket—the non-partisan ticket—shall not exercise the functions intrusted to them, and shall have their powers greatly diminished, continuing in office, it is true, but not continuing to exercise the powers with which the voters intrusted them. The citizens of New York have a right to demand that they be permitted to exercise the same kind of intelligent control over the making of the organic law under which they are to live that is granted to the people of the new States.