

# Swing To Party Politics More Evident Since 1939

## Independent Movements Hit Peak Under Mayors Jones And Whitlock

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**M**OST observers apparently agree that in the recent municipal election the Republican Party won a considerable triumph and the Democratic Party suffered a corresponding setback. In the flood of speculation and analysis which has followed the election one curious circumstance seems to have been largely overlooked; not only in letter but in spirit Toledo's 37-year-old charter denies to the Republican and Democratic parties, as such, any function at all in the affairs of the city.

Although the Toledo charter has been amended several times, the issue of the nonpartisan ballot has never been specifically submitted to the electorate since the charter was approved in 1914, and it is therefore impossible to say how the voters would react to a proposal to revive party primaries and party designations for candidates for municipal office. There is, however, a growing body of evidence tending to show that, at the least, the Toledo voter today no longer resents the intervention of political parties in municipal elections. On Nov. 6, to cite the latest example, only two council candidates ran without party endorsement, and they placed 16th and 18th respectively, at the bottom of the list.

To many older voters of Toledo this change in opinion must represent a rather startling contrast, for there was a time in the not too remote past when the nonpartisan appeal was one of the most effective that could be made on election day. The gradual undermining of the nonpartisan position, rapidly accelerated in recent years, con-



**SAMUEL M. JONES**  
*Enemy of all parties*

stitutes a most interesting episode in the political history of Toledo.

The so-called independent movement in Toledo began on March, 1899. The occasion was the Republican city convention, and the place was Memorial Hall. The convention had met to nominate a Republican candidate for mayor, but its principal accomplishment was to provide the impetus which launched the nonpartisan idea.

Samuel M. Jones had been nominated by the Republicans and elected mayor in 1897, but his conduct in office had lost him the support of many party leaders who were determined to prevent his renomination. Mr. Jones was equally determined to get it, but in any case he had no intention of withdrawing from the race. As it turned out, he lost the nomination by a very close vote, and then announced himself as an independent candidate. On election day he re-

Democratic candidates combined, and he carried every precinct in the city but one.

Swept away by the magnitude of his stunning victory, Mr. Jones offered himself as a non-partisan candidate for governor in the fall election of 1899. He was beaten, of course, and ran far behind the Republican and Democratic candidates, but even so he received a surprisingly high vote. For the rest of his life Mr. Jones used up much of his energy in an unremitting war upon political parties.



**D**EMOCRACY as a way of life has had few warmer defenders than Jones, but it is not clear that he ever really understood the workings of democratic government. Mr. Jones interpreted nonpartisan to mean anti-party; he refused to permit his many followers to organize themselves as a formal political unit, and when they did so without his consent he gave them no support. The result was that he never could command any significant support in council, and in consequence the net accomplishment of his long tenure of the office of mayor was very little.

For instance, the first plank in his platform for municipal reform was the public ownership of public utilities. But far from acquiring any new utilities for Toledo, he only succeeded in losing one of the most important that the city possessed—the natural gas works and pipe line—at the time he took office. In short, while Mr. Jones remained in office as long as he lived—he was re-elected mayor in 1901, and again in 1903—he was not able to get much done because he would not allow his supporters to organize and capture control of council.

The position of the political parties during the Jones era was unusual. The Republican leaders were solidly against the

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**BRAND WHITLOCK**  
*Won without party aid*

mayor, but the party itself was badly divided. The great reform wave which was to blossom out a few years later as Theodore Roosevelt's progressivism was already making its influence felt among the Toledo Republicans. Every time Mr. Jones ran for mayor he got a large Republican vote, and he could not have been elected without it. The Democratic Party in those days was a negligible factor in Toledo politics, and constituted a kind of perpetual minority.

Mr. Jones died in 1904, and after a brief interim he was succeeded as mayor by Brand Whitlock, the new champion of the nonpartisan movement. Mr. Whitlock had served his apprenticeship under Altgeld in Illinois and was a Democrat by inclination, but his partisanship was never strong and he found the role of independent much to his liking. He was more of an intellectual than Mr. Jones and in some ways his personality was less attractive, but the two men had been close friends and shared many of the same ideas and beliefs.

Like Mr. Jones, Mr. Whitlock was elected mayor of Toledo four times, but unlike Mr. Jones, he did not let the matter rest there. The nonpartisans organized themselves as the Independent party, and with Mr. Whitlock at their head the Independents took and held control of council. However, the Independents were uniformly beaten when they attempted to extend their influence in elections for county and state offices, for here the Republicans remained strong. The Republican party, in fact, provided

candidate for mayor ran fourth, behind the Independent, the Republican, and the Socialist, and the Democrats elected only one candidate to the 18-man city council.

After his last election Mr. Whitlock refused to run again, and in Dec., 1913 he was appointed minister to Belgium by President Wilson. Left without a leader the Independents floundered badly, and wound up with two candidates for mayor in the election of 1913. As it turned out, the division made no difference for the Republican candidate, Carl H. Keller, polled more votes than the two Independents together. At the same election, however, the voters also approved a home rule charter commission, and so it happened that Mr. Keller was the last mayor of Toledo to be elected with legally recognized partisan support.



**T**HE new charter, as drawn up by the commission and approved by the voters in 1914, is still the basic law of Toledo, although of course its structure has been greatly altered by numerous amendments added since its adoption. The charter provided that candidates would qualify for the primary by petition; that the primary would be nonpartisan; and that no party designations would appear on the ballot.

The advocates of the charter had many good arguments to advance in its favor. After all, the big issues upon which the national parties contested the elections had little or no relevance in city government. A man's views on sound money and the tariff were obviously of small use as an index to his capability as a municipal official. The business of a city government was to furnish as much service to the community as its taxes would support. In arriving at this perpetual compromise between what the taxpayer demanded and what he was willing to pay for, which was the main occupation of municipal officials

everywhere, there was clearly no place for a debate on foreign affairs or national domestic policy.

At first it seemed as though the Republicans and Democrats intended to abide by the charter, for in the elections of 1915 and 1917 partisan activity was inconsequential. But in 1919 John O'Dwyer put up a Democratic candidate for mayor and made a strong campaign in his behalf. The Republicans did not offer a

candidate, and the election was won by Cornell Schreiber, a nominal Democrat but an actual Independent, who had fallen heir to part of the following of Mr. Whitlock. Thus the nonpartisan idea was still alive, but its days were numbered.

In 1921 the Republicans entered the arena under the leadership of Walter F. Brown and won a decisive victory. Henceforward, and to an increasing extent, city hall was run on a partisan basis. It was evident that the nonpartisan enthusiasts had ignored a number of important factors in their analysis of municipal governments.

For one thing, the nonpartisan



**CORNELL SCHREIBER**  
*1919 Independent mayor*



movement in Toledo, for all the theoretical soundness of its position, was in reality based upon the outstanding personalities of Mr. Jones and Mr. Whitlock, and men of this caliber could not be counted upon to appear with sufficient frequency to insure continued success. For another thing, it was plain that city governments did not function in a vacuum. A man who was an efficient and able nonpartisan mayor would also be a man ambitious for higher posts, and these could not be had without party affiliation. It was

The nonpartisans did not give up, however. The 1914 charter had established a strong mayor in Toledo. The nonpartisans proposed to reduce the mayor to the status of a figurehead, and to substitute a nonpolitical efficiency expert called a city manager. In 1927 a second charter commission was elected. The commission revised the charter so as to provide for a council elected by proportional representation, and a city manager. The revised charter was submitted to the voters in 1928, and was defeated. In 1931 a new city manager plan, this time without the PR council, was put to the voters, and again it was defeated. But in 1934 the voters accepted both the city manager plan and the PR council, and a new nonpartisan era had begun.

In Jan., 1935 the City Manager League was incorporated for the purpose of "making the city charter an effective instrumentality for good government and to foster and defend efficient and nonpartisan local government." In 1935 and 1937 the League debated two attempts to repeal the city manager plan and PR before they had been given an adequate test. The League also dominated the municipal elections, and saw to it that men were elected to council who were willing to conform to the city's new institutions of government. In short, the League was a genuine nonpartisan group in the tradition of the old Independents.



**F**OR some years the City Manager League reigned supreme, but in the election of 1939 it suffered what proved to be a fatal defeat. For the first time the League failed to win a majority in council, and only succeeded in electing 4 of its 9 candidates. In Feb., 1940 the League ceased to exist. It is worth noting that two of the four candidates elected on the last League ticket were Lloyd E. Boudet and John P. Kelly.

During the war politics in Toledo was quiescent, but with the end of hostilities interest in local issues revived. In 1945 and 1948 unsuccessful assaults were made upon PR and the city manager plan. In the election of 1945 the Democrats reduced the Republican majority in council from 7-2 to 5-4, and The Blade commented on the "deterioration of the theoretical nonpartisanship" since the death of the City Manager League. The city government still outwardly adhered to the idea that the best qualified man should have the job, regardless of party affiliation, but the Democrats thought it odd that the ablest man available usually turned out to be a Republican. The Blade speculated that the vacuum created by the disappearance of the League "may well be filled by the deterioration of party balance."

All question as to the supremacy of party politics disappeared after the 1947 election. The Democrats won a 5-4 majority in council, which they then organized on a partisan basis. Abandoning precedent, the Democrats chose both a mayor and vice mayor from their own ranks, and elected them on a strict party vote. Insofar as the city administration was concerned it was necessary to move at a slower pace, since the Democrats had a majority of only one, but in Dec., 1948 council accepted the resignation of City Manager George N. Schoonmaker, and Mr. Finch frankly admitted that party affiliation would have weight in his selection of administrative officers for the city. It might now be argued that the city government was bipartisan in structure, but all pretense of nonpartisanship had openly been abandoned.

The outlook for the nonpartisans was dark indeed at the beginning of 1949, and it was to grow even darker. Looking back over the years, it appeared that the nonpartisans had tried every possible expedient to keep party politics out of the city government, and all of them had failed. First the nonpartisans had organized themselves into the Independent party, but this had collapsed in the election of 1913. Then came the nonpartisan charter of 1914, but by 1921 the city government had once more come under partisan control. The last hope had been the city manager plan and PR, but it was now evident that even the complexities of an indirect city administration with no direct responsibility to the electorate were insufficient to scotch the dragon of party politics. A further and more serious blow to the nonpartisan cause came in the election of 1949, when the voters, after a campaign initiated by the Democratic party, repealed the PR provisions of the charter by a decisive majority.

In 1949 the Democrats also

retained their 5-4 majority in council. However, their partisan control was weakened, chiefly because one of their number developed an unexpected proclivity to vote with the Republicans (the arming member thereupon was denied Democratic party endorsement, and failed of re-election this year).

The council campaign which concluded on Nov. 6, was a party battle in every sense of the word, and was conducted precisely as though it were a contest for the state legislature or for Congress. The result was the election of eight Republicans and one Democrat. If the Republicans wish to go along with the present strong partisan movement in city politics, their overwhelming majority in council will permit them to do about as they please with the city administration. If, on the other hand, the Republicans by some chance should decide to abide by the nonpartisan spirit of the charter, their big majority will serve that purpose, too.

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