

Radio Address - WLOL

Thursday, May 27, 1943, 10:15 PM

Friends and Fellow Citizens:

On June 14, we, the voters of Minneapolis, will again be granted the democratic opportunity of selecting the men and women who will govern our city for the next two years. This means that a great responsibility falls upon all of us - a responsibility not only to exercise our right to vote, but to learn - between now and the day of election - as much as we possibly can about our city's government, its problems, and its candidates for office.

Consequently, in my radio talks between now and June 14, I wish to discuss with you some of the features and some of the problems of our city's government. I should like to discuss with you not only the present difficulties that confront Minneapolis, but the problems of employment, of housing, of industrial expansion, and of labor relations that will confront us in the postwar period.

I should like, in short, <sup>to have</sup> ~~for~~ this campaign ~~to~~ prove informative and educational, not merely political. I wish to view this campaign as an educational forum directed to the objective of promoting an intelligent understanding of the problems of our city ~~government~~.

Too often have our campaigns been reduced to adventures in political back-biting and name-calling. Too often have whispers and slander and personal invective overshadowed our real political issues. Such campaigns insult the intelligence of the American citizen.

I propose to keep this campaign clean and constructive. I want to discuss issues, not personalities. I propose to present a program of action looking to the future, not a recitation of the mistakes and sins of the past.

I say to you frankly and in all sincerity, therefore, that during this campaign-and if elected, during my term of office as mayor - I shall do my utmost to help make our citizens aware of our government, its problems and its possibilities for the future.

I believe that democracy is, above all, a community process. I believe that no government can long function democratically without an enlightened and awakened citizen body. And because I hold these beliefs, I intend to speak directly to our citizens about our city government, its weaknesses, its need for improvement, and its responsibilities to the community.

We, in Minneapolis, hear a great deal of talk about the need for amending or revising our city charter. Periodically, with almost every election, we are asked to approve or disapprove some proposed amendment to the present charter. The great number of these proposed amendments <sup>gives</sup> ~~is~~, in my opinion, cause for wondering: Do we need a change in the form of our city government? Do most of us know how our city government really operates? Is it effective and economical, and do we who pay the taxes get our money's worth in terms of needed services?

I don't propose to answer all of these questions tonight. I believe that the answers to these problems should come only after investigation and study. Many of you will recall that in the primary campaign I pledged that if you see fit to elect me as Mayor, I will,

as one of my first acts, appoint a committee of representative citizens to study the problems of our governmental organization and report on the matter. Such a report will include both an analysis of our present government and recommendations for possible changes. Such a report will tell us whether or not there is overlapping and inefficiency, and whether our government is economical or expensive. This report will then be given to the people for discussion and criticism and you, the voters, will make the final decision. I have no private notions of governmental reorganization which I wish to foist upon the people of Minneapolis. Instead, I believe that any change in our form of city government must come from the people themselves if it is to represent the real needs and wishes of the people of Minneapolis. That is the way democracy has advanced in the past; that is the only way it will advance in the future.

Tonight, in opening this educational forum on our community problems, I should like to have you examine with me our present city government - how it came to be, how it operates, and what are its possibilities for meeting the needs of the future.

We must keep in mind the fact that the people of Minneapolis have never, in the history of our city, been asked to vote on a form of city government especially designed for the city of Minneapolis. Our present city charter is almost wholly a collection of laws passed by the state legislature over a period of 47 years and lumped together in the year 1920. This loose collection of statutes, plus a few amendments, is now the charter, the constitution of our city. Those of us who have had occasion to study it have been forced to admit that it is a complicated and confused document, more

than ten times as long as the American constitution. It is a document which, like Topsy in the famous story of Uncle Tom's cabin, has just grown, without plan, without form, and most important, without consideration of the wishes and needs of the people of Minneapolis. It is a charter which seems to allow for a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding and which seems to permit the shifting of responsibility from one branch of our government to another.

Under this charter, or constitution, we have in Minneapolis a Mayor-Council form of government. That is, we have a council, made<sup>up</sup>/of 26 members, representing the 13 wards of the city. This council is the legislative body, the Congress of our city. It passes our laws, it levies some of our taxes, and it appoints some of the members of other branches of our government.

May I take this opportunity to say that we have been fortunate very often in electing to that council, able and conscientious men who have been responsive to the wishes of the people of Minneapolis. For the most part, our city council in recent years has done a good job and has provided the leadership for various community enterprises.

A second feature of our city government is the large number of independent boards and commissions which administer such functions as public welfare, taxation and assessment, our library, and our public parks. These boards, too, have been graced with men of ability, men who have had courage and foresight. Perhaps the best known example is the work of our Park Board which, over a period of many years, has planned and constructed the beautiful park system of our city.

The third feature of our city government is the office of the mayor. He is the executive of the city, occupying a position with respect to local government that the president occupies with respect to the nation. The mayor has not only certain legal duties to perform but also responsibilities of leadership, coordination of civic enterprises and the function of representing our city with interests and groups outside our municipal limits. He should ~~be~~ be, in other words, the leader of the city and its official spokesman.

The mayor is obligated by the terms of the charter to enforce the laws. He has power of veto over council enactments. He appoints the chief of police, and if he is honest and conscientious, he will directly supervise the work of law enforcement. The mayor has also the power to appoint ~~xxxxxx~~ the members of the civil service commission and ~~xxxxxx~~ some of the members of the board of public welfare. In addition to these duties, he is also a member of several boards and commissions.

It is the duty of <sup>a</sup> sincere and conscientious mayor to attend the meetings of the boards and commissions and to participate in their work. A mayor who fails in this responsibility has failed in his duties as a public servant.

But the mayor's office, as I have already pointed out, is greater than mere law enforcement and attendance at meetings.

As the city's chief executive he is responsible for leadership in various civic enterprises. His high office must be made available for the numerous community projects that aim to produce a greater Minneapolis. His efforts must be directed continuously at civic betterment and social welfare.

As the official spokesman for the city He must do more than hand out keys to the city. He must speak for it in Washington and in the state capital. He must explain and dramatize the business opportunities in the

City of Minneapolis to industry, and he must actively promote such business enterprises as are necessary to achieve full employment and community prosperity.

A mayor who is more than a figure-head will actively concern himself with furthering friendly relations among the city's different economic groups. A mayor who is a real leader will take the initiative in such necessary projects as slum clearance, the elimination of traffic hazards, public works, ~~and~~ city planning, and overall civic development.

Let us stop for a moment and examine just one of these items-- city planning. City or public planning means more than zoning laws, sanitation or street repairing. Right now, public planning has a special significance for all of us in America for right now we are engaged in a mighty war effort against dictatorship and tyranny.

Thousands of the young men of Minneapolis have left our city for the deserts and fox-holes of Bataan and North Africa. Every day some friend, or son, or relative is called to the service in the fight for democracy. With every passing day new Minneapolis families are added to the already long list of those who have men in service. And this means that more and more of us are suddenly made aware of the problem of the post-war world.

How can those of us who are touched by the absence of a son, a brother or perhaps a father help but wonder about the future of these men? How can we help asking ourselves to what kind of a city will our boys and girls return?

Will they be able to get jobs here? Will they find economic and social conditions desirable enough to want to come home?

What we at home must realize is that Johnny and Joe and Charley and Sammy and all the rest of our men now spread to the far corners of the earth are thinking of Minneapolis and of their homes in Minneapolis. The home they know and the things they love are the things for which they are

fighting. It is our obligation to prepare for them a home and a city in which they can take pride. That, at least, must be their share in our common victory.

But, many will say, we in Minneapolis cannot do this alone. No, perhaps we can't-- for we are not an isolated community but a part of a great nation. That makes it all the more necessary that we bend our efforts to the task of planning a future for our fighting men.

The strength of America is ultimately in its people and in its local governments. If those local governments fail in their obligations, America will fail. If Minneapolis-- a city of half-a-million people-- cannot meet the challenge of the post-war world, the loss will be felt not only by ourselves, but by the whole nation.

The greatest obligation for planning for the return of our men falls upon our city government. And the one person most responsible in that government is the mayor. If the mayor is drab and colorless, and without vision, he will inevitably fail to provide the over-all community leadership necessary to a task of such magnitude. This makes it clear that our mayoralty elections must turn, finally, on the question of leadership.

*out* At one time in our history, it was expected that government need only keep the peace and enforce the law. But in the past 500 years, since the rise of industrialism and technology and the growth of great cities, government has assumed new obligations-- the obligations of providing necessary social services to the community. We now expect government to do more than merely keep law and order. We expect that government will concern itself with seeing that its people are well-housed and well-fed; we desire government to achieve harmony between various economic interests; we now expect government to concern itself with public welfare, full employment, education, and security for the aged. *out*

*place* We ~~put~~ our trust in government to prosecute the war against tyranny.  
*place* We ~~put~~ our trust in government to protect us against illegal profiteering

and black markets. We have come to realize that government is an instrument for constructive purposes, and those who support my candidacy will do so, I hope, with the understanding that I stand not only against the evils concerned with law enforcement, but that I stand for a real effort on the part of government to bring needed and desired services to the people of our community.

End

In other words, if I am elected, I intend to bring to Minneapolis the kind of leadership that I have outlined as being necessary in a great metropolis and in a great democracy. I intend to be concerned directly with the two major problems that now confront us-- winning the war and planning for the post-war period.

This will be my task, as it is your task. For the one lesson that we in a democracy must learn is that government is everybody's business. It is, in fact, our biggest business. We are all shareholders in it. How much benefit we derive from our share in government will depend in part upon the quality of the leaders we elect. We can no longer afford to say that we are not interested in politics, for politics is interested in us. Our lives are intimately affected by the kind and quality of government that we establish.

~~If our city government, for example, does not help to wipe out black markets, then both we and our war effort will seriously suffer.~~

If only for selfish reasons, therefore, we must see to it that our governments at every level are efficient and conscientious. That means we must elect men who have a genuine moral and social purpose. It means we must have sincere leadership. It means we must all become participants in this, the most promising democracy the world has ever known.

Friends and Fellow Citizens:

On June 14, we, the veterans of Minneapolis, will again be granted the democratic opportunity of selecting the men and women who shall govern our city for the next two years. This means that a great responsibility falls upon all of us-- a responsibility not only to exercise our right to vote, but to learn-- between now and the day of election-- as much as we possibly can about our city's government, its problems, and its candidates for office.

Consequently, in my radio talks between now and June 14 I wish to discuss with you some of the features and some of the problems of our city's government. I should like to discuss with you not only the present difficulties that confront Minneapolis, but the problems of employment, of housing, of industrial expansion, and labor relations that will confront us in the post-war period.

I should like, in short, for this campaign to prove informative and educational, and not merely political. I wish to view this campaign as an educational forum directed to the objective of promoting an intelligent understanding of the problems of our city government.

Too often have our campaigns been reduced to adventures in political back-biting and name-calling. Too often have whispers and slanders and personal invective overshadowed our real political issues. Such campaigns insult the intelligence of the American citizen.

I propose to keep this campaign clean and constructive. I propose to discuss issues, not personalities. I propose to a program of action looking to the future, not a recitation of the mistakes and sins of the past.

I say to you frankly and in all sincerity, therefore, that during this campaign and-- if elected, during my term of office as mayor-- I shall do my

utmost to help make our citizens aware of our government, its problems and its possibilities for the future.

I believe that democracy is, above all, a community process. I believe that no government can long function democratically without an enlightened and awakened citizen body. And because I hold these beliefs, I intend to speak straight out to our citizens about our city government, its weaknesses, its need for improvement, and its responsibilities to the community.

Tonight I am opening my campaign for the office of mayor of the City of Minneapolis-- a campaign that has as its fundamental issue the question as to whether or not this city is to have sound and constructive, yet dynamic, leadership in handling the serious and difficult problems that will confront us in the era through which we are passing.

I mean the kind of leadership that will unite all sections, groups and interests solidly behind the war effort.

I mean the kind of leadership that will dramatize for our citizens the problems that confront our community as part of a great nation at war.

I mean the kind of leadership that will focus the attention of our citizens upon the pressing problems of efficient governmental organization, of constructive post-war planning, of sound education, of juvenile delinquency, and of courageous law enforcement.

I mean the kind of leadership that will help to educate our citizens about these problems and that will offer constructive suggestions for their solution.

I mean the kind of leadership that has the unqualified confidence of business and labor.

I mean the kind of leadership that recognizes the potentialities of this great metropolitan area.

But leadership in itself is not enough. Our system of government must be highly sensitive to the opinion of the voters. Our representatives, whether in the office of mayor, in the city council, or on other boards and commissions, must live or die politically on the basis of their capacity to satisfy the needs of their constituents. In America today as in no other country the success of government must rest boldly upon the capacity of individuals to manage their own political affairs.

If our democracy fails to meet the demands of the hour the fault will not lie with the system alone but with ourselves. In the ultimate reckoning the government of a free and democratic people is not merely a matter of structure or form but also of men. Positive leadership coupled with effective responsibility is the answer.

Our democracy must stand or fall upon its capacity to respond to the needs and desires of the mass of men and women who make up the community.

Tonight I wish to present to the citizens of Minneapolis a program of action-- a pledge of leadership. In the course of this campaign I shall discuss with you the several major problems that ~~require your attention~~ confront our community, and tonight I wish to discuss one problem that requires your attention, namely, the nature and structure of our city government. I propose to deal directly with this issue and to deal with it now.

Let me examine with you the history and development of Minneapolis municipal organization. The first city charter was established by legislative enactment in 1872. From 1872 to 1892 the state legislature through a series of special laws amended and altered the structure of government at will. Boards and commissions were added; powers and responsibilities were divided among new agencies. Finally, in <sup>1892</sup> ~~1872~~, the voters of Minnesota amended the Constitution of the state to prohibit special legislation, thereby supposedly ~~preventing~~ preventing the state legislature from tampering with local municipal affairs. In 1896 the principle

of Home Rule was incorporated into the state Constitution, again supposedly giving the people of Minneapolis the right to govern themselves without interference by the legislature.

But from 1896 to 1920, when our present city charter was adopted, and from 1920 until this very session of the legislature recently ended, the state legislature has continued to change, amend, or tamper with Minneapolis government.

Home Rule has not existed. Instead, special interest groups have gone to the legislature and fostered more and more piece-meal tampering with our government. Legislators unacquainted with or uninterested in the welfare of Minneapolis have been our rulers. This is not government by the consent of the governed. We, the citizens of Minneapolis, have been the easy pawn of special legislation for special interests with special purposes in mind. To this I am unalterably opposed. ~~Indeed~~ I believe in local self-government. I believe that the people of Minneapolis can and will solve their own governmental problems.

The present government of the City of Minneapolis has, like Topsy in the famous story of Uncle Tom's Cabin, just grown-- without plan, without form, and, most importantly, without consideration of the wishes and needs of the people of Minneapolis.

Confusion and misunderstanding have long characterized our government. Responsibility has been shifted from the mayor to the council and from the council to the numerous ~~tax~~ independent boards and commissions.

In this situation leadership and over-all direction has been for many years sadly lacking. ~~However, the city has provided sufficient leadership~~ Today our city suffers from the confusion and lack of singleness in purpose. The absence of strong, purposeful leadership has permitted laxity in administration, uneconomical government, and, all too frequently, poor law enforcement.

In all this confusion there has been one redeeming feature, and that is

our city council. Although its functions and powers have been gradually diminished, it has fortunately maintained a high level of service, supplying what governmental leadership our community has had.



# Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright in this digital version belongs to the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, link to, or email content, however, for individual use.

To request permission for commercial or educational use, please contact the Minnesota Historical Society.



[www.mnhs.org](http://www.mnhs.org)