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GIST OF S.C.A.A. REPORT ON COUNTY GOVERNMENT

SCAA GALLEY TYPE

O N 11 of the prominent recommendations in Governor Lehman's message to the Legislature in early January was that provision be made for reorganization of local government in the interest of economy and of efficiency. A considerable volume of bills and proposed Constitutional Amendments has been introduced on this subject.

Two bills would offer to each county several optional forms of county government from which it might choose by referendum. Two other bills would authorize each county to establish substantially any form of government which it might devise through a local county charter revision. One proposed Constitutional Amendment would make possible a complete form of county reorganization through a referendum. Another, by a County Charter Commission subject to county referendum or by a county referendum; another by a County Charter Commission subject to county referendum or by referendum; another by a County Charter Commission subject to county referendum or by referendum. The subject is of extreme importance. It is generally admitted that the form of government which is actually in use in the various towns and counties in this State is so badly in need of reconstruction and substantial readjustment.

Health is an important function of towns, villages, cities, and county government can be approached in precisely the same way. It is generally recognized that the distribution of functions as between towns, villages, counties, cities, and local units for special purposes, is utterly illogical and needs a thorough reorganization and substantial readjustment.

The S. C. A. has been intimately associated with experience up to date. In this field such experience may be closely scrutinized, and plans devised which have had the most promising results, which are currently in use, may be adopted. Not only is it possible to experience as throwing light upon the future, may not lead to improvement, and might even endanger, such good results as have been achieved, bit by bit, over a quarter of a century, in the better legal framework for the exercise of health and welfare duties. Much effort has been devoted to the improvement of local health and welfare activities; and in some respects great progress has been made, particularly in towns and cities, and county government can be approached in precisely the same way. It is generally recognized that the distribution of functions as between towns, villages, counties, cities, and local units for special purposes, is utterly illogical and needs a thorough reorganization and substantial readjustment.

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Health is an important function of towns, villages, cities, and counties; welfare duties are among the most important functions of local government. A prominent political leader remarked not long ago that a third of the total budget of his county was expended for health and welfare purposes.

The subject of reorganization of town and county government has been closely scrutinized, and plans devised which have had the most promising results, which are currently in use, may be adopted. Not only is it possible to experience as throwing light upon the future, may not lead to improvement, and might even endanger, such good results as have been achieved, bit by bit, over a quarter of a century, in the better legal framework for the exercise of health and welfare duties.

The S. C. A. has been intimately associated with these efforts to improve County tuberculosis hospitals, which are under the control of an elected official instead of a Board, but most of them are still far below an acceptable standard.

Similarly, the County Health Department, where established, has been put down on paper what looks like a logically complete, symmetrical, and consistent plan of organization, practically equally suited to all towns and counties in all States. Another way is to study the various towns and counties in these States which are actually functioning; which of their plans they are performing efficiently, and by what types of official machinery. By putting down on paper what looks like a logically complete, symmetrical, and consistent plan of organization, practically equally suited to all towns and counties in all States.

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The S. C. A. A. has asked itself what lessons might be drawn from the practical experiences of the last quarter of a century in health and welfare activities in the various local governments. After such a search for the significant results of experience, it has reached a few conclusions as to what seems to it some important features that might well be included in any reorganization of local government.

After consideration by a special committee, including persons of wide knowledge and experience in this field, and after a careful study of the suggestions of that Committee, the Board of Managers, at its meeting on February 15, adopted the following recommendations as expressing its opinions at this time on the subject of the reorganization and readjustment of local government in so far as the subjects of health and welfare are concerned:

1. There should be a chief county executive, either elected by the people or appointed by the Board of Supervisors, somewhat similar to the mayor or city manager of a city.

2. The transfer of certain governmental functions, particularly those pertaining to health and welfare, from the smaller units of government (e.g., towns and villages) to the county itself, or possibly in some instances to the State, is essential to secure effective administration of such functions.

3. It would be more desirable to enact legislation establishing a standard form, or alternative standard forms, embodying sound fundamental principles of county government, than to permit each county to determine, both in structure and in detail, its own form of government through local charter commissions.

4. While a constitutional amendment is needed for complete reorganization of county government, such a constitutional amendment should not require a local referendum for transfers of functions under general laws enacted by the Legislature, as is proposed in the pending bills proposing a constitutional amendment.

5. It would be unwise to authorize individual towns to transfer their welfare functions to the county by local referendum, as proposed in the bill for optional forms of county government. The present permissive powers of the Board of Supervisors to transfer responsibility for relief administration from all towns to the county should remain, unless and until county administration is made mandatory by the Legislature.

6. County Departments of Health established under the optional forms of county government, should have the same organization, powers and duties as County Departments of Health established by Boards of Supervisors under present permissive laws or amendments thereto. The present permissive powers of the Board of Supervisors to establish a County Department of Health under a Board of Health with jurisdiction over the towns and smaller villages, should not be nullified by the establishment of a Department of Health without mandatory jurisdiction over towns and villages, and with a Director appointed by the county administrative officer, as proposed in one of the optional government bills. It would be unwise to authorize individual towns to transfer their health functions to the county by local referendum as is proposed in the bill for optional forms of county government.