

XLIX. RESPONSIBILITY IN STATE GOVERNMENT.**F. F. Blachly**

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(Abstracted)

In every state of the United States, the government is organized with a two-house legislature, a governor elected by the people, and an independent judiciary. In many states, also, most of the important administrative officers are subject to popular election. Theoretically, this system means control of the government by the people, and a system of checks and balances which will assure mature consideration of all measures, and will prevent any one de-

partment of government from encroaching upon the liberties of citizens. In practice it means that the people have no real control over the government, and it opens the way to every sort of fraud and trickery.

How is it that a system so excellent in theory works so badly? The answer is brief—namely, that this system make it impossible to fix responsibility for mismanagement or fraud on anyone. Unless the people know definitely what person, or at least what political party, should be blamed when things go wrong, they lack the first prerequisite to making things go right.

Under the Oklahoma system of state organization, the governor while called the "chief executive," is really only one of many executive and administrative officers, each of whom is elected by the people, with powers and duties fixed by the state constitution. Since the governor cannot remove these officials, no matter how badly they may mismanage affairs, he lacks all real control over them; for, as Dr. Cleveland points out, direction of officers comes from the power to "hire and fire."

The relationship between the governor and the legislature is as unsatisfactory as that between the governor and the other executive officers. Under the most favorable circumstances the governor has no way of compelling the legislature to pay any attention to his recommendations, nor has the legislature any way of compelling the governor to carry out its plans, except such influence as may arise from the need of "party harmony." When, as frequently happens, the governor and one or both houses of the legislature are of different political parties, the state's business must come to a standstill, as was the case in Oklahoma during the 1921 session of the legislature.

What remedy could be applied to this situation? The writer believes that a reorganization of state government following business principles is needed. In any large business enterprise, the stockholders elect a board of directors, and the board of directors chooses an executive head of the business, who is given a free hand in selecting subordinates and managing the business, subject to the approval of the directors. If the business is not managed to suit the directors, they select a new manager; if it is not managed to suit the stockholders they select a new board of directors. Such a system fixes responsibility, and makes rapid readjustments possible.

Similarly, a one-house state legislature elected by the people should be entrusted with the selection of a governor. This would insure harmony between legislative and executive. The fear that

such a system might be detrimental to liberty has no foundation, so long as the people chose the legislature. On the other hand, this system has the great advantage of laying responsibility for good government directly upon the majority party in the legislature. The governor should choose the heads of all executive and administrative departments, and should remove them at will. This would make him completely responsible for the carrying out of public policy and the management of public business; and any failure on his part would be reflected by popular pressure upon the legislature to select a better chief executive. Such a system of reorganizing state government according to business principles would be very unpopular with professional politicians, who profit by the present system which enables them to avoid responsibility; but it would place control over government actually, as well as nominally, in the hands of the people.