

Section 14

Bureaucratic Menace to Democratic Government
Assemblyman Sheridan Heglund (D. San Diego County)
Capital News Service
(June 21, 1960)

On June 21, 1960, Assemblyman Sheridan Heglund (D, San Diego County) wrote the following "guest" column for Capitol News Service. It gives his view on the menace of bureaucracy to democratic government.

SACRAMENTO, - (CNS) -- There appears to be a well-organized, concerted effort to destroy traditional county government. A key plank is to scuttle elected local officials and replace them with "professionally-trained" appointees, over whom the electorate would have little if any control.

Many of those most active in this movement are recent "public administration" graduates of our colleges and universities.

A parade of witnesses appeared before a meeting of county and municipal government committee of the Assembly in Sacramento recently. A number of us were shocked at the strength of the movement and the frankness of the witnesses.

We were told that county government was old-fashioned, hopelessly inefficient, and one witness compared it to an ox-cart. They wanted the committee to recommend changing the rules, so that nearly all county officers would be appointed.

It is obvious that this will be one of the major issues of the 1961 legislature. Efforts will be made in the next legislature to change the law so that most or all county officials will become appointive.

A good friend of mine, Assemblyman Jim Holmes, (R-Santa Barbara), made what I thought was a telling rebuttal. He asked one witness, an instructor from the University of California, this question:

"Since you have no confidence in the ability of voters to select wisely, would you want to go all the way & just elect a President? You might have the President appoint all the governors, and the governors appoint all the city and county managers, and these appoint everyone else!"

Voters in Kern and Sacramento counties recently strongly rejected plans to have county administrators appoint on a "merit system" the key public officials. Voters were told they would be governed efficiently by professionals at less cost to the taxpayers. Voters quite wisely, in my opinion, rejected this nonsense.

These defeats at the polls did not slow down "government by experts" witnesses. A top administrator from Sacramento county coolly told us the voters were mis-informed.

There are a number of parallel drives under way. An effort is being made to abolish separate districts and take control away from local voters. Some members of the Governor's commission on metropolitan government apparently are intent on whittling away powers of elected city councils and boards of supervisors and depositing control with regional boards.

Speaking personally, I think one of the things all of us are most proud of is that the people in this nation are sovereign that only the voters have the ultimate right to make policy decisions.

I do not think that appointed officials operate more efficiently than elected officials, and speaking generally, I believe that every time we replace an elected official with an appointed one, we are surrendering a part of our liberty.

Concentration of power at any level of government in the hands of appointees not responsible to the voters does not in the long run contribute to strengthening our democratic government.

Thus, it appears the concept of a regional government for the entire Bay Area has a number of built-in defects that will prevent any plan to establish a form of super-government inconsistent with the best interests of its smaller component units from gaining easy acceptance. It is destined to meet a hard, determined fight from those counties, like Solano, who cannot completely identify themselves with the entire Bay Area and have no desire to inherit its problems at the expense of determining their own destinies.

Among the many functions of the proposed new level of government is so-called regional planning, planning in the sense of giving regional direction to the use of land in the area—the key to the agency's political future.

Control of land use ultimately means control of the area's economic destiny. Thus far, this has been a political power of prime importance to the local level of government and a power which won't be surrendered upon just casual consideration—particularly when this authority is to be bolstered by the power of eminent domain and the right to impose taxes as well as issue bonds.

Introduction of the Knox committee's findings to the legislative arena well may open the door to another first for California, but it isn't likely that the lawmakers in Sacramento and the people of the nine Bay Area counties will move through it at too fast a pace.

As Assemblyman Dunlap observed at a legislative workshop held in Fairfield on Dec. 19, implementation of the Knox committee recommendations still is a long way from final legislation and shifting forces in the Legislature can be expected to produce changes that materially could affect the final form of any regional organization that apparently will be created.

In the interim, however, Solano County cannot afford to be lulled into a sense of false security because of temporary inaction on the legislative level. We must be constantly alert to every move and parliamentary procedure that may occur and be prepared to counteract them effectively. We have come too far to lose the battle through complacency and desultory acts at times when positive action is needed.

EDITORIALS

Vigilance Is Needed

In a state which already has established a long record of political firsts and political controversies, California is assured of becoming deeply involved in another precedent-breaking imbroglio during the 1969 legislative session. And it promises to be a dandy.

The subject will be regional government, specifically for the San Francisco Bay Area where successful accomplishment of a regional government would be a first but certainly won't be imposed without controversy and a hot legislative fight.

The subject will get a full airing, however, when the lawmakers consider recommendations on the issue stemming from a major study by the Joint Legislative Committee on Bay Area Regional Organization. Headed by Assemblyman John T. Knox of Richmond, the committee already has released its proposals and has announced it will introduce a measure calling for what it labels a limited regional government for the nine Bay Area counties.

The battle lines on this controversial subject already are drawn with Solano County unalterably opposed to mandatory inclusion in any form of regional organization with taxing, bonding and condemnation powers which could subordinate local interests to the whims of the more populous Bay Region counties by application of the "one-man, one-vote" rule.

One of the basic tenets of the Knox committee report—a proposal calling for an area-wide referendum with only a majority vote required to make the organization a reality—already has been protested by Assemblyman John F. Dunlap of Napa, a member of the committee, who maintains voters in the smaller counties should decide themselves whether their individual counties should be included. He has suggested individual referendums in each county as a means of preserving this right of self-determination.