

## SUMMARY

# THE CITY MANAGER AND THE MUNICIPAL SYSTEM IN THAILAND

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### Introduction

One of the announcements of the Revolutionary Party after its seizure of power on 20 October 1958 mentioned the creation of a Committee to find ways and means of improving the country's administration. In a press interview in July this year, the Chairman of the Committee—Nai Dhawee Raengkam, Deputy Minister of Interior—stated that, among others, the recommendation for the introduction of the city manager system for the municipalities was submitted to the Council of Ministers for consideration. The Council of Ministers, in giving its approval, had, however, stated its wish to postpone the introduction of the system until after the promulgation of the new constitution now in the process of drafting by the Constituent Assembly.

### The Thai Municipal System

In Thailand the municipal system, in the sense that we understand it to-day, had its beginning 58 years ago when King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) decreed the establishment of a "sanitary area" at Tha Chalorm in Samud Sakorn Province.

The first Municipal Law, however, did not come into existence until 1933—a year after the coup d'état that introduced the constitutional monarchical régime into the country. The year 1953 saw the promulgation of a new municipal law which is still in force to-day. According to this law, a municipality is composed of the following:

- a. Municipal Assembly
- b. Municipal Executive Council

Formerly, the Municipal Assembly comprised two categories of members, equal in number, namely those elected directly by the people and those appointed by the Ministry of Interior. After the coup d'état of 20 October 1958, the Revolutionary Party issued an order effecting a change in the municipal structure. By this order, the Municipal Assembly would compose only of members appointed by the Ministry of Interior. This, however, was followed by another change

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whereby past members of the municipal assembly in each province were called to a meeting by the governor for consultation. The names of the candidates for the Municipal Assembly, having been selected by the governor according to the numbers prescribed by law,<sup>1</sup> were mailed to all the heads of families who were eligible voters in their province for approval. Their judgment will determine the governor's decision on names of candidates to be submitted to the Ministry of Interior for formal appointment as members of their municipal assembly.

The Municipal Executive Council comprises, according to the Municipal Law of B.E. 2496 (A.D. 1953), a mayor and 4 council members in the case of city municipality, 2 in the case of town municipality and 2 in the case of district municipality. All members, including the mayor, must be chosen by the municipal assembly from among its members. The formal appointment of members of a municipal executive council is being made by the governor.

The municipal executive council is responsible for the day-to-day operation of municipal activities, headed by the mayor. Recently the Ministry of Interior decreed that members of a municipal executive council had to include some permanent provincial officials chosen by the governor, including the mayor who had to be a permanent official of the Ministry in the province. Usually deputy governor, district officer or provincial or district police chief are included in the list of these permanent officials.

Again, according to the said Law, day-to-day operation of a municipality is carried out by the permanent officials and workers of the municipality with a deputy mayor, who is also a permanent official of the municipality, as chief. It is worthy of note that, even in the routine operation of the municipality, the real power is not the deputy mayor but the municipal executive council who in actuality heads the line of municipal authority.

Although modern municipal system in Thailand was introduced as far back as 1933, the system had been laden with obstacles which, in the findings published by the Ministry of Interior in 1937, were essentially as follows:

(1) While the number of municipal assembly members set by law was too high, the minimum academic qualifications required of the candidates were too low. Also there were too few candidates standing for election.

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<sup>1</sup> 24 for city municipality  
18 for town municipality  
12 for district municipality

(2) Members of the municipal executive council, instead of performing duties expected of them, had spent their time seeking aggrandizement of power, wealth and followers. To achieve these ends, they employed means which were far from being commendable, involving all too often violations of rules and regulations.

(3) The permanent officials and workers of the municipality, required by law to be under the control of the municipal assembly, had found it more advantageous for them to please the assembly members than to perform their duties. The result was a very unsatisfactory state of municipal affairs.

(4) By giving extensive freedom to local municipalities in the handling of their affairs, the result had been most disappointing for in the wake of this freedom were found graft, nepotism and abuse of power in various forms.

(5) Overhead expenses of the municipalities were unduly high, due in the main to large allocations for salaries (because of a large number of municipal assembly members prescribed by law) and inefficient management.

According to the census taken in 1960, the population of Thailand was 26,257,916, only twelve per cent of whom were living in the municipal areas. The obstacle, accrued from this situation, which by far surpassed those already mentioned was that the bulk of the population in the municipal areas were aliens. As these aliens had practically no rôle in municipal affairs and that approximately 96 per cent of the incomes of the municipalities had been allotted as salaries for the members and personnel, an immense limitation was therefore being imposed on municipal progress in this country. In fact progress under these conditions was well-nigh impossible.

Also the fact that municipal areas invariably exist within administrative areas of district offices had in no small measure led to a duplication of work for both parties. Among others, it created an undue burden on the population in having to comply with statutes and regulations of both.

Another notably weak link in the municipal chain was the fact that an unusually large number of municipal executive councils had been given a vote of no-confidence by their municipal assemblies as a result of political manoeuvring by the latter, thus leaving small margin for harmony and co-operation necessary for progress.

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### **The applicability of the city manager system in Thailand**

Having elaborated principal defects in the municipal structure and workings in Thailand, the authors proceed to describe the city manager system as a means of remedying these defects. Commencing with the history of the city manager system, and going on to record its significant contribution to progress, in the United States, the authors turn to its possible application in this country.

In praising its appropriateness to Thai conditions and its being a possible cure for the ailing municipalities in Thailand, the authors cite a standard by which a city manager will be judged. Owing to the fact that a city manager is vested with full power in the performance of his duty, the International City Managers' Association has set down a professional code of ethics upholding the honour and integrity not only of himself but also of his profession.

According to this Code, a city manager must be well versed in the municipal assembly-manager system and must himself be confident of his ability to efficiently discharge his tasks expected of him under the system; a city manager must realise that he is a man trusted by the people; he must be a man of honour and integrity; he must not divulge professional secrets nor exploit them for his own personal gain nor allow them to be exploited by others for theirs; he is not a political leader; he must always bear in mind that it is the Municipal Assembly elected by the people who makes policies for the municipality and is responsible for their implementation; the public must be constantly informed of the activities of the municipality, with a special emphasis on facts and not on policy; to promote efficiency in discharging his duty, a city manager must not allow intervention in his management of municipal affairs; the recruitment, promotion, demotion and dismissal of personnel is the duty and responsibility of a city manager and must be carried out in accordance with rules and regulations; he must perform his duty without bias and prejudice.

The writers then go on to describe the advantages and disadvantages of the city manager system. On the advantage side, quoting a survey made by 50 municipalities in the United States, one finds the following:

- (1) It markedly bridges the dissident elements in the municipality.
  - (2) It improves the administrative machinery of the municipality.
  - (3) It improves work performance and supervision.
  - (4) More than any other systems, it promotes leadership in a municipality.
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- (5) It enhances the prestige of the municipal assembly.
- (6) It improves working skill.
- (7) It expands and spurs to importance the rôle of the municipality in the community.
- (8) It is economical.

The disadvantages, which the writers have drawn from Fisher and Bishop,<sup>2</sup> comprise the following: The system symbolises lack of leadership in a municipality in minimizing the rôle of the mayor; democratic principles are being sacrificed in favour of full power of the city manager who is not even elected by the people; the noted absence of initiative on the part of municipal assembly members who habitually look up to their mayor for new ideas and actions may continue into the city manager system; the difficulty in finding a talented and devoted man for the position of city manager; its unsuitability for large-sized municipalities.

In conclusion, the authors remark that the idea of a city manager system is not new in this country since it was mentioned in the plan for municipal reforms advocated by the Ministry of Interior as far back as 1950. In its possible application in this country, however, the authors sound a warning that unless the system is correlated with a growing interest and participation of the public in municipal affairs, a sufficient income of the municipalities and a more democratic attitude on the part of the members of municipal assemblies as well as the municipal personnel, the city manager system may well fail. To avoid possible failure of sweeping magnitude, which the municipalities in this country can at present ill afford, perhaps a pilot project, accompanied by, or better still forestalled with, the education of the public in the city manager system, will prove the wisest alternative.

*Summarized by Patom Jarnson*

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<sup>2</sup> Marguerite J. Fisher and Donald G. Bishop, *Municipal and Other Local Government* (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1950), p. 68.