

BUREAU NOTES

No. 569

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NOVEMBER 7 BALLOT PROPOSALS

In addition to electing various officials, Michigan citizens will vote November 7 on three proposed amendments to the State Constitution and a referendum proposal. In Detroit, a proposed amendment to the city charter will be on the ballot.

Proposal No. 1 would delete obsolete language from the Constitution (III, I – “Elective Franchise”) referring to inhabitants residing in Michigan in 1835 and 1850 and those who declared intention of becoming citizens prior to 1894. It would change residence requirements of electors in any city or township from 20 to 30 days.

At present, any United States citizen who is 21 years of age, an inhabitant of Michigan for six months, and a resident in a city or township for 20 days preceding an election may register to vote. The purpose of increasing city or township residence requirements is to pave the way for subsequent legislation requiring registration at least 30 days before an election. Election officials say such legislation will give them time to check election rolls for fraudulent registration and reduce overtime. Most other states allow from 30 to 56 days for this purpose.

Proposal No. 2 would authorize the State legislature to issue bonds not to exceed \$65 million for building mental, epileptic, and tuberculosis hospitals and training schools for mental defectives.

Michigan now has 29,000 hospitalized mental patients. For the year ending June 30, 1951, the legislature appropriated \$29 million to provide mental care and \$5 million for special maintenance, repair, and construction. Nevertheless, estimates are that Michigan's mental hospitals are 22% over-crowded and that 4,000 mentally ill Michigan citizens are not now hospitalized.

Proponents say the \$65 million bond issue will help ease this situation by providing completely equipped hospitals for 8,125 additional mentally ill patients. They say that a bond issue is an ideal method of financing because it permits spreading the cost throughout the life of the buildings. It has not been specified what percentage of this money, if any, would be used for tuberculosis hospital construction.

Opponents, who object to the method and not the purpose of the proposal, say that funds are not provided for operating the new hospitals after they are built and that no provision is made for paying the bonds, plus interest, nor for how long a period the bonds shall be issued. Interest charges, they point out, will make the total cost considerably in excess of the \$65 million. One procedure for escaping this interest charge would be to use the \$50 million Veterans' Benefit Trust Fund to build mental hospi-

tals. Under this plan, the legislature would make an annual appropriation for veterans' benefits to replace the present Trust Fund income. This would avoid creation of debt when \$50 million is available in the State Treasury.

Arguments have also been advanced that mental hospitals are populated to a substantial degree with persons over 65 who do not benefit from expensive psychiatric care and equipment. Removal of these estimated 3,000 patients to less expensively constructed and operated custodial institutions would free beds for those who could benefit most. Mental hospitals appear to be taking the place of the family as a means of caring for the "old folks."

Proposal No. 3 would amend the Constitution (II, 22) to define subversive as any act, or advocacy of any act, intended to overthrow the form of government of the United States or Michigan by force or violence or any unlawful means. It declares subversion to be a crime against the State, punishable by any penalty provided by law. It also says that subversion shall constitute an abuse of the rights secured by the free speech and press section of the Michigan Constitution (II, 4) and the rights secured thereby shall not be valid as a defense in any trial for subversion.

After the legislature unanimously placed this proposal on the ballot, it passed a series of laws without waiting for the increased constitutional authority. These provide imprisonment up to a life term for subversive activity, authorize a State Police security squad, and widen the scope of the criminal syndicalism law to permit prosecution for actual violence used to achieve industrial or political reform. There are also new federal statutes bearing on this subject.

Proposal No. 4 is a referendum to legalize the sale of yellow oleomargarine.

In February, 1949, the legislature legalized the sale of yellow oleomargarine, providing that certain federal standards are observed and that the product is plainly labeled. This action resulted in an initiative petition. However, before the law could take effect, sufficient signatures for a referendum were filed, thus delaying the marketing of yellow oleo. *A "yes" vote will allow the 1949 law to become effective. A "no" vote will prohibit the sale of colored oleomargarine.*

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The *Proposed Charter Amendment* would allow City of Detroit employees on leave of absence because of illness to retain membership in the City employees' hospitalization and death benefit plan for a period not to exceed four years. The present limitation is four months.

To remain a benefit plan member, employees would be required to maintain their contributions, as would the City. Estimates are that approval of the plan would cost taxpayers about \$10,000 a year. (While not specified by ballot wording, the amendment also would place a 30-day limit on the time an employee would have to indicate he wished to remain a member after transferring to a City department not under the pension plan.)