

1932



270

Mayor's Address

The Inaugural Address of Mayor Anthony J. Stenina is as follows:—

We are assembled here today to inaugurate a new municipal government for the City of Chicopee. We, whom you have elected, have taken the oath of office and have sworn to faithfully discharge the duties that are imposed upon us by law as the representatives of the citizens. I sincerely hope that not one of us will waver from the line of duty that is set before us. It is vital to the future welfare of this city that we act with the utmost care and accuracy in the discharge of our duties. For, we are committed to the definite object of renewing the financial strength of our community and government.

As the chief executive it becomes my duty to present a program of action that we should adopt so that we may best serve those who have chosen us as their representatives.

With no desire to reflect on preceding administration, yet, without mincing words, I am forced to speak plainly on the subject of our city's financial status. I doubt, if ever before in the history of the city, has a new administration been instituted, that has been confronted with such handicaps and financial difficulties as the present one is.

We take office at the time when the financial world is in an unsettled state.

We will experience real difficulties in procuring temporary loans to meet our current obligations until our taxes are collected. The City Treasurer's first attempt during the present fiscal year to obtain a temporary loan from the usual banking sources met with a refusal, and he was com-

pelled to borrow from a private source at an excessive rate of interest. We are now paying an interest rate of five and one-half per cent where, heretofore, we have paid as low as one and two-fifths percent. In the face of such demands for high interest rates it becomes necessary to limit our temporary borrowings to the barest minimum.

At the close of the past fiscal year there remained to be paid \$900,000 in temporary notes. This amount must be paid within the next three months. I know that our finance executives will spend many sleepless nights seeking a solution to this vexing problem.

The overdraft of \$43,262 made by the Welfare Department on last year's revenues to meet the cost of providing aid to the needy is another problem passed on to us. This was due to the failure to provide sufficient appropriations for this department, without need to our City Auditor's warning.

Our municipal indebtedness today has reached the disheartening amount of \$2,121,150. Bond issues authorized in the past fiscal year will increase our debt retirements and interest payments this year by approximately \$40,000. We will be compelled to set aside \$510,000 for debt retirement and interest payments in 1932. Our bonded indebtedness is such that we can only borrow \$150,000 without the consent of the State Legislature. It is a serious state of affairs and one that must be recognized by the citizens.

Thus far I have spoken of expenditures that have already been made this fiscal year, that will tend to increase our unreasonably high tax rate. Now let me say something concerning the loss of revenue from various sources that confront us.

Real estate values have dropped. Residential valuations have in certain instances been wiped out completely. Commercial and industrial property valuations have shrunk in alarming proportions. The inventories of our manufacturers show a decided loss in the value of their raw materials

and finished products. In considering these assets it has become compulsory for them to fix the value to their buildings and machinery at lower levels than heretofore. This condition forces us to look forward to the prospect of a shrinkage in the total property valuation that will be assessable.

An estimate has been given to me that the refund to the city from the state on income, street railway, public service and bank taxes will be as much as \$100,000 less than last year. There is every prospect that we will be compelled to pay an increased state and county tax. Summing up all of these factors, we find ourselves placed in control of a city confronted with increased costs of government and decreased sources of revenue.

In such a predicament our duty is plain. We must reduce the operating cost of our government and promote a new means of financial support for our city. We must cut from our budget every item, no matter how small, that is not essential to the health and safety of our citizens and their prosperity.

Today, this city has as one of its greatest responsibilities, the duty to see to it that none of its people are deprived of the necessities of life. This responsibility must be accounted for positively and without any side-stepping.

A distribution of welfare relief funds does not meet the issue squarely. We must provide an opportunity to our citizens to earn a livelihood. We can do this only by carrying on a program of public works which will give a maximum of employment.

If the city's financial resources were sufficient, this responsibility could be met without resorting to any unusual steps. But, since all of the city's resources have been wiped out, it becomes necessary to provide a new means of financial support. For one new source I look to municipal employees, who have, during the past few years, had occasion to feel the hardships of the depression, the least.

With few exceptions all municipal employees are protected by the security of continued employment with the further protection that upon reaching a certain age they are entitled to half pay pensions. This security has been provided in part for city employees by the very persons who are now in want through no fault of their own.

It becomes the duty of all municipal employees in a measure to assist those in their time of need, who, heretofore, have provided them with that security that they now enjoy. I call upon each municipal employee to come forward valantly and to cheerfully turn over to the city ten per cent of each one's salary for the balance of the fiscal year.

This proposal is made as a means of meeting a temporary emergency. By accepting this sacrifice on the basis that I propose it will not become necessary to make a permanent reduction in salaries. It is my opinion that this sacrifice need not be continued beyond the duration of the current fiscal year.

I am not in favor of taking the more drastic steps of reducing salaries of municipal employees by the actions of the Board of Aldermen and the School Committee, a step that seems almost impossible to avoid unless every municipal employe voluntarily makes the sacrifice proposed.

I speak plainly in saying that any municipal employe who is unwilling to make this temporary sacrifice has lost sight of his obligations to his fellow citizens.

By the means of this co-operation, there will be made available an amount of money that, it is my intention to have set aside as a special emergency relief fund. A portion of that fund can be used for public works construction.

A municipal employment bureau will be established that shall be free from any political influence. The same of every able bodied man seeking aid from the welfare and soldiers' relief departments will be included on this bureau's rolls. This bureau will be organized to establish close rela-

tions with our industrial and commercial employers, that the unemployed may be served in the most effective manner.

A harmonious relation between private and municipal agencies is a public necessity at this time and must be recognized.

It is a fundamental truth that the welfare of the community is dependent upon the welfare of its industries. The responsibilities of each are clearly defined. A government must organize itself to meet effectively the demands of the industries. Industries must organize to meet the demands of the people.

Today our industries are burdened with problems that even under normal conditions would seriously hamper them in their various pursuits. Our government must be prepared to lend to them, the aid that is within its province. But, our industries must not lose sight of the fact that they have a duty to the community in which they are situated as well as to their stockholders. They must resort to every reasonable means of giving employment to the people of the community.

Those who have invested their wealth in our industries must learn to understand that the losses which accrue from an idle factory are far more serious than those that result from unprofitable operation over a period of temporary depression. An idle factory brings about the destruction of the security of the investment while a loss suffered through an unprofitable operation over a period of temporary depression is quickly recovered when a readjustment in business takes place.

I bring this subject up for discussion because I believe that our manufacturers have lost sight of the fact that there is a sharp distinction between the powers of the federal and state governments on the one hand and a city government on the other hand of raising revenues from taxation. It must be clearly recognized that the authority vested in a city to levy taxes is granted to it by the state and it must follow the

precepts established for it no matter how inadequate they may be to meet the special requirements of a city such as our present demand by the needy for aid. Our city can only derive its revenues by the assessment of taxes against real and personal property and a poll tax levy. The federal and state governments can on the other hand create a luxury tax and the like to meet any unusual demand at any time.

The responsibilities that make for a prosperous community do not rest entirely with the government and industries. We as individual citizens must assume a share of that responsibility and we can do so, to a large extent, by encouraging the trade at home spirit.

The School Committee has repeatedly for three years, called upon the city government to provide additional class room space for junior high school accommodation. Upon being denied the purchase of an unusually expensive site it proceeded to select another one which with its attendant betterment expense will without doubt prove prohibitive in cost.

A building designed to meet the class room accommodations called for by the School Committee would cost approximately \$220,000 and adding to that the cost of the site and minimum betterment expense, we are called upon to provide a quarter of a million dollars to meet that particular need.

I fully appreciate the needs of education. I know that we must give our children every educational opportunity possible. But, on the other hand, we can do for them only that which we can reasonably afford. Because of our financial condition, I deem it unwise to undertake the purchase of a site and the construction of a junior high school building this year.

The expenditures made under the supervision of the Highway Department constitute the second highest individual departmental cost that must be met from this tax levy. I believe that sharp reductions can be effected in its budget.

I intend to have a broader competition in the bidding for the yearly contracts for materials and supplies that will

be needed by that department for the construction of roads, sewers, and sidewalks. It appears to me that too few concerns have in recent years entered into this competition. I am aware of the fact that on several occasions in the past, the bid of the lowest bidder has been rejected. Unless there be a very good reason for such conduct, it is inexorable and a subject worthy of investigation.

It has come to my attention that many of our citizens are convinced that the city has not received from its highway employees a full repayment in labor for the wages that have been paid them. I believe that a more efficient system of time keeping will correct any abusive practices that may have sprung up in this department.

The lack of discipline in the ranks of the police and fire departments has become a matter of concern to me. In many instances violation of rules and regulations have gone unpunished. I expect that during my administration at least, discipline will be strictly maintained and I take this occasion to assure the heads of the police and fire departments that I will stand firmly behind them in any measure of discipline that is fairly taken.

In order to effect a reduction in the budgets of these two departments, I propose to discontinue the practice of employing reserve men during the vacation periods. Several thousands of dollars can be saved in this way. I have no desire to be unfair to reserve men but, I must resort to practical methods in the reduction of our municipal costs.

I suggest that regulations be adopted, temporarily at least, during the enforcement of this policy that will prohibit the employment of regular policemen as special officers at places of amusement. All requests for such special police protection should be granted by the assignment of reserve officers.

The affairs of the water department have been administered without due regard to its income. Unnecessary and elaborate improvements in the water supply system have been undertaken in spite of the opposing good judgment of

substantial citizens. Such conduct in the past compels the present administration to devote more than one third of the water department receipts this year to pay off indebtedness of the department. I intend to set up executives in that department who will put in force a program of curtailment. The water department must build up a reserve that will make unnecessary the incurrence of additional debt to meet the requirements of further expansion.

It becomes necessary for me to serve all of the city officials and employees with notice that the use of city owned automobiles must be limited to city business. The fact that city cars are kept in the individual garages of our city employees, scattered all over the city, in a great measure contribute to that growing practice.

It appears to me, after careful study, that the providing of a municipal garage for the housing and caring for all municipal cars will only correct the foregoing practice but, will also save money for the city, I may recommend the erection of such a building.

There is no doubt in my mind that the centralization of control of city cars when not in use will affect certain economies that cannot be overlooked. Large savings can be made in the purchase of motor fuel, oils, tires, and accessories through competitive bidding. The cars can be kept in condition at all times and the repair bill for the same will be at a minimum. It is a worthwhile project and one that I intend to study carefully.

Four years ago the ash removal and garbage collection service was taken from the control of the health department and set up as a separate department under the direction of a supervisor. When the change was made, the citizens were promised a substantial saving in the cost of this service.

Since then an unusually large number of fuel oil burners have been installed in the homes and buildings of our city, yet, the ash removal cost has increased. Such a condition exists because several persons are now doing certain work that can be efficiently done by one man.

I intend to have these positions abolished and to have the work done by the remaining employees.

The maintenance cost of the city hall and annex has grown beyond the limits of a reasonable figure. I see no need for the continued use of private telephone service in the city hall offices since the installation of a branch telephone exchange.

Too much emphasis has been placed by the Parks and Playgrounds Commission on many phases of its recreational program. Duplication of educational pursuits carried on in the public schools does not seem to me to be the right kind of vacation activities. I believe that the object of a recreational department should be the development of the physical vigor of our youth.

I propose to restrict to a minimum the number of instructors and supervisors employed by the department, giving preference to young men and women who are in real need of summer employment to earn their way through college.

In conclusion, fellow citizens, may I call your attention to the fact that we can carry out the foregoing program only with the most sincere cooperation on the part of the heads of the several departments and the wholehearted support of the Board of Aldermen, whose members I now call upon to assemble in session in their chambers to organize for the task that lies before them for the coming year.