

## CHAPTER XIV

# The General Assembly

*A Biennial Convocation at Which Delegates from the Forty-eight States Gather to Exchange Opinions and to Plan a Course of Interstate Action.*

BY the end of 1932 the problems of the depression had fastened themselves, like the old man of the sea, upon the shoulders of the legislators, and in the struggle to rid themselves of at least one problem, the first General Assembly was called by the American Legislators' Association. Administrators and legislators from the state, local, and federal governments were invited to Washington to attend in order to discuss the pressing problem of conflicting taxation.

This first meeting proved so successful that a Second Assembly was held in Washington in February, 1935, at which it was decided to make the Assembly a regular biennial meeting so that state officials might sit down at regular intervals and tackle their most pressing problems.

Resembling closely the procedure and organization of a state legislature, the General Assembly of the Council of State Government is composed of representatives from all forty-eight states. Each state is entitled to send three official delegates; one representing the house, one the senate, and the third, the governor. In those states which have Commissions on Interstate Cooperation, the chairman appoints the three delegates. In the other states, the presiding officers of the legislatures appoint their delegates and the governors name their representatives. The president of the Council issues the call to the assembly biennially in the odd years, when forty-three of the state legislatures are in session. As president of the Council he is ex-officio speaker of the assembly, although any governor in attendance is ex-officio member of the assembly and may be asked to preside.

The organization and promotion of the assembly are carried on by the executive

director of the Council, who is ex-officio director of the Assembly and secretary-treasurer.

### *Work of the Assembly*

The value of these general assemblies is readily apparent. They bring together, in common council, the men who make the laws, and the men who enforce or administer the laws.

In the past many distinguished commissions have applied themselves assiduously to state problems only to find that there was no official way by which their recommendations would reach the attention of the legislators—the men who make the laws. The Assembly attempts to bridge this gap, and therein lies its potential value.

In the interim between Assemblies, committees are at work on the program for the forthcoming Assembly. Also at work are the Interstate Commissions whose members are giving particular and specialized study to their subjects. (Chapters XVI-XXII.)

The day preceding the opening of the Assembly is given over to executive meetings of the affiliated associations of the Council, and of the various interstate commissions, at which time they put their reports and resolutions into final draft for submission to the members of the Assembly.

With the opening of the full session of the Assembly legislators and administrators sit down together for consideration of proposals for action to be taken by the states. The interstate commissions submit recommendations for uniform legislation in their fields; the associations of administrative state officials—the attorney-generals and the secretaries of state—and the American Legislators' Association present the results

of their interim studies for the improvement of governmental practices which require legislative action; and the Commissions on Interstate Cooperation and the District Secretariats report on their accomplishments during the biennium. During the two-day session the delegates discuss the reports presented, and adopt the proposals which they recommend be carried back to the respective states for legislative action.

Following the Assembly, meetings are held on regional problems.

#### *Purpose of the Assembly*

The purpose of these assemblies is to present to the states uniform legislation recommended by groups which have devoted

specialized and expert attention to certain problems of government. The delegate, after considering an interstate problem in the light of the discussion and recommendation brought out at the assembly, undoubtedly has a broader perspective regarding the problems confronting his state. Also he may be provided with suggested legislation for the solution of these problems. On returning to his legislature he is in a position to present the recommendations of the Assembly and to secure the passage of uniform legislation, giving impetus to the solution of interstate problems by cooperative action.

The Third General Assembly of the Council of State Governments met on January 12, 1937, at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D. C.

*The following article from the magazine State Government, April, 1937, gives a brief résumé of the work done at that meeting.*