

## CHAPTER 9

# Epilogue

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We come now to the end of the history of the Board of Public Works and a time for some editorial comment. There is a noticeable tendency for biographers to become identified with, and apologists for, the subjects of their biographies, whether the subject is a person or an institution. It is a tendency that must be consciously resisted if the biography is to be objective. I have tried in writing this chronicle to offer that resistance and to be objective. I shall lower my guard just a bit in this brief concluding chapter.

The Maryland Board of Public Works is almost unique in American government. Although some cities have such creatures or variations of it, there is nothing like it either at the federal level or among the other states. Some states have coordinative bodies of one kind or another, serving some of the functions committed to our Board of Public Works, but none, to my knowledge, have a constitutionally based troika quite like our board.

From a political perspective the board serves first and foremost as a dilution, through sharing, of the executive authority that would otherwise be vested in the governor. That indeed was the principal objection to it voiced by the Constitutional Convention Commission and, to a degree, by the 1967 Constitutional Convention itself, both of which believed that executive power should be centralized in the governor. An interesting response to that philosophy was given by the Reorganization Commission in 1921. It said in its report:

The Governor has no need for further power. Indeed, the expression,—so frequently used as one of the strong features of the cut-and-dried reorganization plan which has started the round of the States,—“centralize power in the hands of the Governor,” really involves the use of loose language; for, in large measure, the things done in other States thus to centralize power in the Governor, do not centralize any new power in him at all, but simply remove the checks and balances, which now exist, and which, certainly for the most part, ought to be retained upon the exercise by the Governor of the powers he already has.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly the state of Maryland could survive without the board; forty-nine other states have done so. But in both politics and government (assuming that there is some distinction between them), convenience, rather than necessity, is the more relevant criterion. Over the years the board has served its function well. Notwithstanding some occasional frolics and failings, it has acted with dedication and efficiency and has effectively discharged the myriad of responsibilities delegated to it. The men serving on the board have not always acted unanimously, but despite their independent, and occasionally antagonistic, political constituencies and viewpoints, they have generally

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1. *Reorganization Commission Report*, p. 20.