

The Gothenburg System of Liquor Licensing

From time to time we have received inquiries about the Gothenburg system of liquor licensing, particularly as it affects the municipality. We had the opportunity of studying the system on the spot some years ago when the idea was taken up in England though not on anything like the large scale it was in Sweden. The system which originated in the town of Gothenburg, Sweden, in 1865, is a licensing scheme by which all places selling liquor are controlled by companies directly responsible to the local authority. Each tavern, or saloon, is in charge of a manager who in addition to a regular salary receives a small commission on all non-intoxicants, and no customer is allowed to have more than two drinks of intoxicants at one time. The company is allowed up to five per cent. on the actual capital invested; all profits above that going to the local treasury. Such in brief is the Gothenburg system.

As a temperance scheme the Gothenburg scheme of licensing has worked out well. Without interfering with the liberty of the subject the local authorities hold complete control, through the direct licensing and regular inspection of each saloon, of the liquor consumed in the community. So well did the system work that practically every community in the country soon adopted it and for long has Sweden been looked upon as the most sober country in the world. In England the system was introduced in a modified form by the late Earl Grey, who formed

a company called the Public House-Trust Company. The stockholders were principally landowners who had on their estates a certain number of public houses, and while these houses were situated principally in country places, yet where the system was introduced it certainly proved a success at least so far as the diminution of the consumption of intoxicants was concerned. In the urban centres the public houses, or saloons, were, and are to-day, almost entirely owned by the brewing interests so that the system had little or no chance of being tested in the thickly populated districts.

As to what chance of success the Gothenburg system would have in Canada is hard to answer. In the first place almost the whole of the Dominion is dry, and by May next prohibition will be general—until the end of the war. Whether or not complete prohibition is to be a fact after the war depends on the citizens. Some people, and thinking people too, believe that a reaction will take place. They consider that the citizens look upon prohibition as a war measure only, and as such will loyally obey the laws, but just as soon as peace does come they will expect, and demand, a return to the old order. We prefer not anticipating. But should the citizens of Canada demand a change or even a modification of the present prohibition laws when peace reigns again, we do suggest in all seriousness that the Gothenburg system is infinitely better than the old order of indiscriminate drinking that prevailed through the Dominion previous to the war.

THE DEADLY LEVEL CROSSING.

In spite of the agitation that has been going on for years the deadly level crossing is still too prominent a fact in many of our urban centres. Even in Montreal, with its population of three-quarters of a million, the level crossing is to be met in every part of the city though negotiations have been going on between the local authorities and the railroads—principally the Grand Trunk—for more than twenty years, but nothing has come of it. No doubt each side would give many reasons why each conference has failed to bring results—the other side, of course, being in the fault. In the meantime the danger to human life has increased because of the increasing density of population and the larger number of traffic blocks; and in a lesser but proportionate degree this same danger is in most Canadian cities and towns.

In Canada the great difficulty is that part of the expense of the removal of the level crossing, either by raising the tracks or tunneling—usually half—must be borne by the municipality affected, even should the railroad or railroads, be willing. If not willing then the Railway Commission must investigate, and there the matter ends. What is wanted, and badly wanted, in Canada is an Act compelling all railroads to raise their tracks where they run through urban districts. In Chicago an order was made some time ago which compelled all the railroad companies, not only to raise their tracks, but to bear the whole cost, and every municipality in the Dominion should have the same power.

CIVIC STRIKES IN CANADA.

Civic strikes would seem to have become quite common in Canada—Toronto, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Vancouver,—have all been affected through the striking of municipal employees, principally of the outside services. Though none of the strikes were of a very serious nature yet the fact that it was possible for any body of civic workers to feel themselves with a grievance, whether right or wrong, is disturbing to the proper administration of civic affairs. It should be remembered that the municipality is supposed to be a model employer to the scavenger as well as to the highest paid official and strikes, if possible, should be prevented. We find that at least one civic strike could have been avoided if the higher officials had used a little discretion and we do suggest that no municipal official should be allowed to take the responsibility of turning down any demand of civic workers, when the alternative is striking, unless with the sanction of the council. The responsibility rests entirely on the council, not on any official however well placed he may be.

THE COMMUNITY END.

“No man can serve two masters; he cannot serve himself and the community; for then the kingdom would be divided against itself; he can only serve himself by serving the community, and this is surely the only sound foundation on which industry can rest. If we are ever to solve the great industrial problem, it can only be by recognizing that industry is primarily a national service, and that the object of those engaged in it is first and foremost for the good of the community as a whole.”—L. Hitchens.