

Trustees' Bulletin

THE OFFICE OF TRUSTEE

In Canada, as in other countries where responsibility is divided between central and local governing bodies, the former gets the public attention and the latter do the work. The Dominion Houses get the newspaper headlines, but the Municipal Councils do most of the work of running the country. In educational affairs the Provincial Department of Education may be the storm centre for public interest, but the machine is kept running largely by the local school boards.

A position on a school board is both honorable and an important one, but it is so little sought after generally that the Legislature has thought it necessary to make it difficult for a ratepayer to refuse the honor or to get rid of it after he is elected. It might be thought that the position is considered something of a disgrace like that of scavenger or public hangman, but this is not the case. It is a matter of pure indifference and a lingering of the vague idea that educational matters are for women and schoolmasters and not for practical men who raise wheat or sell groceries for a living. The fact that our schools are fairly efficient is some proof that a large share of public attention is not necessary for the well-being of some public institutions. At the same time there is no doubt the fact that so much of our education is so vague and impractical is owing to the fact that many of our efficient men are not giving it any part of their attention. Any public meeting at which an educational topic is broached affords proof of the amazing ignorance and carelessness of the average voter on the subject. If no personal or religious feeling enters or no party bias, the ratepayer simply waits patiently until something of real interest turns up.

Few school trustees can claim to be specialists in education or even to be fairly abreast of the general progress in

the subject. In considering the question of how to teach any subject he must in most cases give way respectfully to the trained teacher. But in the greater question of what to teach his opinion is entitled to some weight. He may be ignorant of the history and theories of education, but he is in practical touch with the problems of life and is interested in all methods of meeting them with greater efficiency. Occasionally he has ideas on the subject which are worth while, and he is usually willing to express them with freedom no matter whether they agree with accepted educational standards or not. In this respect he has a great advantage over professional teachers, who are carefully taught at normal schools what they are to believe and what not.

It is easy to see that a school board has a much more difficult task than the municipal councillor. The latter deals with matters which his daily training makes him fully competent to handle, but the former deals with a subject of which he must necessarily be more or less ignorant and which is difficult even for the experts. But on the whole he does wonderfully well—as well perhaps as the experts could do, and certainly more economically.

From one-fourth to one-third of the direct taxation in Manitoba and a considerable portion of the indirect taxation is levied and expended by school boards. On the whole this very considerable financial problem is efficiently and honestly handled. No doubt some school money is wasted and some is misspent, but school board financing compares favorably with Dominion, provincial or even municipal records. It is not often necessary to appoint commissions to investigate our affairs, and the campaign funds of school trustees have not yet become a question of public interest.

In fact one of the great difficulties