

THE CANADIAN MUNICIPAL JOURNAL

A REVIEW OF CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

City of Montreal and
United States - \$1.25

Canada, Great Brit-
ain and Countries
in Postal Union - \$1.00

Published Monthly by

The Canadian Municipal Journal Co., Limited

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President

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Editor

All communications to be made to Canadian Municipal
Journal

CORISTINE BUILDING, MONTREAL
Telephone Main 4362

Any article appearing in
these pages may be re-
produced provided full
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Journal.

Vol. XIII

FEBRUARY, 1917

No 2

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Municipal Conventions

From time to time during the last year the question of delegates' expenses has been brought to our notice—municipal engineers to the Good Roads Congress; public health officers to the Public Health Convention; mayors, aldermen and officials to the conventions of the Union of Canadian Municipalities and the Provincial Unions. We find that quite a number of officials have had to pay their own expenses, though the information gained at these conventions could not help but be of inestimable value to their respective communities. We would point out to those councils who have been so shortsighted as to discourage the attendance of representatives, because of the small cost, that they were depriving the citizens of the benefit of the experiences of the best men in municipal affairs. We were told by one of the most able municipal men on this continent that the papers and discussions of the municipal conventions held in Canada during 1916 were equal in practical value to anything given in any other part of the world. They were an up-to-date education. It is true that this Journal published full reports of the principal conventions, but those seeking special advice for their particular community, got it in conversation with those most qualified to know, and this can only be done by personal attendance.

We need hardly remind the councils of 1917 that civic government to-day is very different to that of yesterday. With our rapidly increasing population, our higher standard of living with its greater demand for good sanitation and better streets, together with a growing expectation of the greatest efficiency in civic administration, no Canadian council can afford to lose the least opportunity to get thoroughly acquainted with the latest civic experiments. This first hand knowledge can best be gained by attending such conventions as we have named and would certainly repay many times the small expense incurred.

This brings us to our next suggestion.

Union of Canadian Municipalities.

If it is necessary that the councils pay delegates to attend civic conventions it is even more so that

they pay towards the expenses of securing the conventions. We refer in this particular to the Union of Canadian Municipalities, which organization has done so much, not only to protect the rights of the citizens from the inroads of the franchise sharks but to raise the standard of civic government in Canada. This has meant much anxious thought and labor and has only been made possible by the self-sacrificing civic spirit of a few good men and the contributions of a few municipalities—too few—though every municipality can claim the help of the Union, as many have who never contributed a cent towards its upkeep; neither before nor since the help was given.

Last year the income of the Union was the smallest in its history of fifteen years, while the demands on its legislative, and most expensive, committee were greater than ever. While it is true that economy has been the slogan of the councils since the outbreak of the war, we are emphatic in stating that the cutting out of the contribution to the U. C. M. is false economy, because the Union is the best insurance that municipal Canada has. Its very existence is a real assurance to the citizens that their autonomous rights are being protected.

Practically all utility franchises are secured by Federal legislation, not Provincial, and we would say that had it not been for the Union of Canadian Municipalities municipal Canada would long ago have been the plaything for the vested interests, the citizens paying the bill. In fact, it was an attempt to trample down the rights of a municipality that started the Union. It is only by the continual vigilance of the executive who examine closely every railway, telephone or other utility bill brought before the Federal parliament each session that the rights of the municipalities affected are safeguarded, and well the franchise grabbers know it. A single municipality, however big, would never have a chance to successfully combat any inroads into its rights. It would have the questionable privilege of paying the parliamentary lawyer's heavy fees only. So why refuse to meet the very moderate demands of the financial secretary of the Union.