

PROMINENT TOPICS.

WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THE GAS AND ELECTRIC LIGHT QUESTION.—The citizens are naturally entitled to have their gas and light on reasonable terms. It is in the interests of the shareholders of the supply company to have its rates placed on a fair business basis. It is not, however, in the interests of the citizens that the city should embark in the manufacture and distribution of gas. It has been estimated that a new plant would cost over \$5,000,000, and it has been suggested that power be acquired by borrowing the necessary funds, which need not be used except considered advisable. This has some resemblance to a Mark Twain joke. Imagine a majority of the City Council having the opportunity of expending \$5,000,000 and not taking advantage of it with alacrity! We venture to say that not many days would elapse after such power was acquired until all machinery of spending \$5,000,000 would be put in motion. It must be remembered that the present Gas Company has a permanent right, which cannot be taken away by the City Council, to supply the citizens with gas. As to the city constructing works with a view of getting capitalists to take it over, very few capitalists could be found to risk their money in such an enterprise in view of the competition, or if they did invest, the result would be a combination, and the citizens would be in a worse plight than at present.

* * * *

THAT THE CORPORATION NOT LIKELY TO OPERATE GAS AND ELECTRIC PLANTS WITH ADVANTAGE IS THE ALMOST UNIVERSAL OPINION.—It is also well to bear in mind that capitalists would not expend millions of money in building gas works and an electric plant or street railways except reasonable franchises and privileges are given them. They are entitled to such consideration. Progress would be retarded by Montreal or any other city depending upon a corporation undertaking works of this class. An important question is what the city should derive in return for the valuable privileges it grants, for it is entitled to consideration for such concessions. We believe the most feasible solution of the gas and electric light problem in this city, would be on the following lines: The city to give an extended franchise for a reasonable term of years for both gas and electricity on condition it is given a certain proportion of the annual net earnings of the company. For instance: After the company pays its fixed charges and a dividend of say 5 p.c. to its shareholders, let it pay a liberal percentage of its profits over and above these payments, to the city. If it earned 10 p.c. over fixed charges, the city would be entitled to a liberal percentage of the remaining 5 p.c. The city could then apply its proportion of profits to reducing the cost of light or the money could be applied as a contribution to the general revenue and thus lighten civic taxation. Whether the company considered it advisable to pay a dividend to its shareholders or not, it should be clearly understood that the city would be entitled to its proportion of net earnings. An arrangement should be made by the company to give the city a representative on the Board of Directors, and for the city to invest say \$50,000 in shares of the company, so as to give it a substantial interest in the enterprise.

ADVANTAGES OF THE ABOVE SCHEME.—An arrangement based on the above lines would, we submit, serve the best interests of both the city and the company, for it would make the shares more valuable on the one hand, and the city on the other hand would receive a proportion of profits. Our civic fathers must not lose sight of the fact that it would not be a proper solution of the light question if the gas question alone were settled without an arrangement in respect to electric light and power as well. The number of gas consumers is comparatively quite limited.

When the above views were first presented THE CHRONICLE said:

"We believe that if the present City Council make an earnest proposal to the Light Company on the above or similar lines the Montreal Light problem can be promptly solved. Try it."

Our advice has been adopted, the City Council has decided to "Try it," that is, it will make an earnest proposal to the Light, Heat & Power Company, and the result can hardly fail to be a step towards solving the gas and electric light problem in this city.

* * * *

THE GAS AND ELECTRICITY PROBLEM IN MONTREAL.—The City Council on 9th inst., by an almost unanimous vote authorized the Fire and Light Committee to open negotiations with the Montreal Light, Heat & Power Company with the intent to secure a reduction in the rates for supplying gas and electric lighting. An attempt to obstruct this action was voted down almost by acclamation. The date for the conference was fixed for 23rd inst.

We had occasion to complain some months ago that this matter had not been dealt with by the City Council in as serious a manner as was desirable. The council since elected has shown a more commendable appreciation of the gravity of this question and of their duty in regard thereto in the interest of the citizens.

* * * *

MONTREAL HARBOUR BOARD.—It is announced that three members of the Montreal Harbour Board, Messrs. Bickerdike, Lemay, Goff Penny and Racine, who were nominated to that position by the Government, have resigned.

The main cause of the constant trouble there has been at the Board for a length of time, was there being too many commissioners who represented diverse interests. Hence their difficulty in working harmoniously in promoting some common policy. The shipping interests of this the national port of Canada, have certainly not been promoted by the chronic dissensions of the Harbour Board for some time past.

* * * *

STABLES AMIDST RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY.—Owing to a very strong protest against a license being given for the erection of stables in the midst of residences which was made to the Fire and Light and the Hygiene Committee, and ultimately the City Council this license was refused. A question was, however, raised as to whether such refusal was legal, which awaits the opinion of the city solicitors. If the city authorities have no power to prohibit the erection of stables in the midst of valuable residential property which would thereby be very heavily depreciated in value by the same disability they would be unable to prevent anything being erected,