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MUNICIPAL OWNERSHIP AT FORT WILLIAM.

The Mayor of Fort William has issued a reply to the special commissioner of the Ottawa Free Press, whose article was published on December 30th last. The Mayor's report not only confirms the statements made in the February Canadian Engineer as to the negative value of evidence opposing municipal ownership of public utilities, but also exposes the methods adopted by corporations to influence public opinion. The Mayor of Fort William states that the "Bell's" special agent, W. C. Scott, was in the town at the same time as the special commissioner; that they stayed at the same hotel; that they returned on the same train; that it is reported on what Mayor Jackson considers good authority that the article was prepared by the two men, on the train, and submitted to the company's head office, before publication. The Mayor in his reply goes on to state that "the city of Ottawa was at that time in the heat of a municipal campaign, in which a by-law for \$50,000 for street lighting was before the people, and the mayoralty campaign was based on the question of the city own-

ing its own franchises. The question of the city installing its own system of telephones is also strongly talked in Ottawa. The by-law was carried by 638 majority, and the Mayor, who favored it, was elected by an equally large majority. The Ottawa Free Press was in opposition to both the by-law and the Mayor."

This is on a par with the tactics of the New England Telephone Co. (Bell), which gathered a mass of distorted statistics designed to show that independent telephone companies had been financial failures. These pamphlets have been quietly circulated in Canada, where competition was threatened. The ex-Mayor of Fort William, on a previous occasion, publicly charged the Canadian Bell Company with publishing falsehoods which were inserted in leading papers as news letters, but were in reality paid advertisements. Truly monopolies must have a very weak case if it is necessary to adopt these methods of "educating" the public. These practices, however, cannot have lasting results, for, as has been well said: "You can fool some people all the time, and you may fool all the people sometime, but you cannot fool all the people all the time." It is this feeling on the part of the people that they are being "fooled" by the monopolies that is responsible for the public ownership wave of to-day. If corporations desire to stem the tide they should get down to solid business, get rid of the dropsy, which is becoming a fatal disease with many companies, and give good service in return for rates sufficient to pay fair dividends on legitimate capital. The methods adopted by some companies are not only costly, but in the end ineffective.

The figures supplied by the Mayor of Fort William show that the net result of municipal ownership to end of 1903, is a surplus of \$31.86 on the water, electric light, and telephone plants; not a large one it is true, but municipalities aim at supplying service at cost, instead of piling up profits for stockholders. The expenditures include all charges to date, for maintenance, interest and sinking fund, the full amount of the latter being on deposit with the Bank of Montreal. The Free Press commissioner's statement that the chairman of the Fort William Board of Commissioners admitted a large expenditure was necessary to put the waterworks system in shape, has already been publicly denied by the chairman himself as an unqualified falsehood. The commissioner also gives the debenture indebtedness as \$437,223, but omits to state that there is a sinking fund in existence of \$71,012.64, making the net indebtedness \$356,220.54. There are other misleading statements alleged to have been made by the Commissioner, but enough facts have been given to render the whole article valueless, to seekers after truth, in regard to public ownership.

The following extract from the annual address of