

# Convention of British Columbia Municipalities

**Municipal Officials Reject Plan of Local Government Board as Proposed in Municipal Act—"Government by Commissioner"—Paper of Mr. F. J. Gillespie.**

The annual convention of the Union of British Columbia Municipalities was held last week in the Horticultural Hall, North Vancouver. The discussions and the papers contributed were of great interest to the delegates representing the municipalities of the Province and to the public generally who are so much concerned with municipal government and administration. Mayor G. W. Vance of North Vancouver gave the address of welcome which was replied to by Mayor Miller of Kamloops. He was followed by ex-Reeve H. M. Fraser of Burnaby, president of the Union. Reeve E. H. Bridgman of North Vancouver district reported as representative of the British Columbia Anti-Tuberculosis Society board of directors. Commissioner F. J. Gillespie of South Vancouver addressed the convention on the subject of the "Government of a Municipality by a Commissioner," the text of which is below. Industrial Commissioner D. B. Martyn, D.S.O., spoke on the "Industrial Development of British Columbia." Dr. M. T. McEachern, of Vancouver General Hospital, spoke on the subject of the "Hospital in its Relation to The Municipality," and Mr. J. J. Carment, city manager of Kamloops, contributed a paper which was read before the convention on the subject of "Government of a Municipality by Council and Manager." This with the routine work of the convention and discussions of the Municipal Act with the social attractions provided, concluded the programme of the convention. Municipal Solicitor McDiarmid resigned from the position which he has occupied for the last seven years as solicitor to the Union in protest at the convention rejecting the local government board scheme as provided for in the Municipal Act submitted to the legislature last year and which was laid on the table for one year.

The selection of officials for 1919-20 resulted as follows: President, District Councillor Jack Loutet, North Vancouver Municipality; vice-president, Mayor McKenzie, Nanaimo; secretary-treasurer, Mayor Gray, New Westminster. Executive, Ald. N. Binns, Trail; Ald. Simpson, Summerland; Ald. Ball, Vernon; Reeve Paterson, Delta; Ald. Kirk, Vancouver; Ald. Sergeant, Victoria, and Reeve Jones, Saanich. Advisory committee, Municipal Clerk Cowper, Saanich; Mayor Gray, New Westminster; Mayor Porter, Victoria; Mayor Vance, North Vancouver; Ald. Colley, Kamloops; Councillor McFarland, Oak Bay; Reeve Bridgman, North Vancouver, and Mayor Gale, Vancouver, Soldiers' relief committee, Controller Raymur, Victoria; Ald. Kirk, Vancouver, and Ald. Sweetman, Agassiz. Delegates to the B. C. Anti-Tuberculosis Society, Reeve Bridgman, North Vancouver, and Reeve Marmont, Coquitlam.

The following resolutions were approved by the convention: That the question of the necessary amendments to the Municipal Election Act to bring it into conformity with the new Municipal Act, be referred to the committee to be appointed to revise the new draft of the Municipal Act.

That all previous resolutions passed dealing with the personnel and powers of the local government board, except the motion for its rejection, be reconsidered and laid over for one year.

That where a municipality is called on to defend an action which affects the majority of municipalities, it shall be lawful for any municipality to assist in carrying out such action.

That nothing herein contained shall be deemed to impose any taxation upon lands held under lease from municipalities during the currency of any lease in existence at the time of the passing of this act.

That the organization and powers of courts of revision remain as at present.

That all resolutions received from the Good Roads League be referred to the executive for consideration. ....

That, in the new draft of the Municipal Act powers be given to municipalities to license and regulate the sale of near beer in accordance with the provisions governing the same in the old liquor license.

Four centres competed for the honor of the 1920 convention, and the final vote was: Nelson 49, Kamloops 15. The remaining unsuccessful places were Port Alberni and Vernon.

Commissioner F. J. Gillespie of South Vancouver, in the course of his address said:

"Every question has two sides, and the subject of municipal government by a commissioner is no exception. The commission form of government has advantages and it may have objectionable features. But, leaving any objections to government by a commissioner for others to point out, I propose to indicate what seems to me to be some of the advantages of municipal administration by a government commissioner.

"The commissioner should thoroughly understand his business, of course, and he should also have the courage of his convictions. Given such a commissioner, he is in a much better position to administer the affairs of a municipality on strictly business lines, without fear or favor, than an elected council. Because, once satisfied that a certain course of action is right, the commissioner is at liberty to go ahead and to carry out his policy without being influenced by diversity of opinion, such as characterizes the deliberations of an elected body and which often prevents the carrying out of necessary measures or results in such modifications or compromises that the object in view is defeated.

"When I took over the administration of affairs in South Vancouver," said Mr. Gillespie, "I made a careful study of the financial situation and I came to the conclusion that it was necessary to broaden the basis of taxation. Having come to this conclusion, the next step was to ascertain how this could be done on a fair and just basis. The Municipal Act gave me power to impose a tax on improvements and I naturally began to look in that direction.

"I knew, of course, that the mere mention of taxing improvements was bound to arouse all kinds of opposition. But, looking at the question from a strictly business point of view, and at the same time with an earnest desire to do nothing that should be at all unfair to the owner of improved property, I came to the conclusion that there could be no reasonable objection to a tax on improvements to meet the cost of certain departments of public administration.

"For instance, I could see no good reason why improvements should not be taxed to meet the cost of education, street lighting, police and fire protection, the charges for general administration, interest and sinking funds, etc., to be borne by the tax on land.

"This decision having been reached I was at liberty to proceed with the taxation of improvements without delay. It is true that my action in this respect caused a great deal of controversy in South Vancouver, which has not even yet died down altogether.

"There are indications, however, that many ratepayers who at first opposed the improvements tax have since come to realize that it is here to stay, not only in South Vancouver, but that before many years have elapsed it will be universally adopted throughout the province.

"And while it is true that public opinion is beginning to change in regard to the taxation of improvements, I want you to consider for a moment what would have happened in South Vancouver if I had been the reeve instead of a commissioner appointed by the government.

"I think you will agree that as reeve, presiding over a council elected by a popular vote, my position in regard to putting into force a tax on improvements would have