

A National Highway

The Good Roads Congress brings a suggestion from British Columbia for the building of a national highway across Canada. No doubt other schemes of a like nature have been mooted from time to time, to be put aside as impracticable, but the time is coming when a national highway will be found to be a necessity to serve as a trunk road for the many highways now crisscrossing every province. We believe that such a road, built of good Canadian cement, good Canadian

gravel and sand, and where it runs through a city or town, with a layer of bitumen, with its three thousand miles of tributary highways, would be a national monument to Canadian faith and virility. We even believe that such a road should be built by subscription rather than by borrowed money. As a monument of peace—when the war is over—Canada could have no grander conception, or anything so utilitarian.

Forms of Municipal Government

Not during the history of the municipal life of Canada has there been a keener interest in its problems and its progress than at the present moment. This has been specially manifested in the Commission of Conservation bringing together all the many forces that have influenced, each in its way, the minds of the citizens to a sense of the meanness of individual selfishness and the necessity for better co-operation if our people are to get the full benefit of citizenship in any city, town or rural township in the Dominion. In possibly no other country in the world is the right of the individual so free. Practically in all the provinces there is local control in civic government. A community can choose its own form of government, consequently every form is in force—aldermanic committees, controller, commission, commission and manager. As to which is the best system we frankly don't know. All have been successful under certain conditions, but for any one to state that any particular system is the only one for all Canada does not know what he is talking about—he certainly cannot realize the local influences that bring about these local conditions, and until our would be reformers have studied every part of Canada—and less of other countries—they have no right to even attempt to introduce any universal form of local government.

The present form of government in most municipalities in this country is that of mayor and aldermen or councillors, with committees; based on the system in vogue in Great Britain. This form as applied to the Old Country is considered the most successful in the world. But they have across the water provisions and checks which we have neither here nor in the United States, at least up to the present. For instance they have the great government department—the Local Government Board—to which every English municipality is responsible for each action done. An English municipality cannot build a sewer nor raise a dollar without its sanction, which is only received after a close enquiry in each case. In Scotland and Ireland separate local government boards are in existence. Owing to the fact that municipal officials are responsible to the Local Government Board as well as to the council, assuring efficiency in the municipal service, much of the actual work is left in their hands, making the position of the members of the council very largely a sinecure. It is true that most of the English municipal work is done in committee, but even there the details are worked out by the officials—in fact, left to them—the members of the committee knowing full well that every item will be properly checked and audited by officials of the Local Government Board. The system has resulted in

the best local men seeking the suffrages of the citizens because of the social standing gained without having to dive into details, at once tedious and foreign to the average citizen. The British form of local government is also in existence in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and where it is allowed, in India, but in each country there is the check of one central authority only.

In the United States civic government has not been a success for two principal reasons. First it was originally based on the Federal form of government, which however successful in dealing with the larger affairs of state has evidently not worked out well in local politics, and second there is no real check. Each of the local councils is a power unto itself, responsible only to the State legislature—a responsibility as divided as there are members—making it comparatively easy for the self-interests to control matters, either in the local council or through the legislators. It was this system that made it possible for Tammany rule in New York. Further the United States is essentially a country of individualists—or selfishness. The Commission form of government is in force in about 350 cities and the manager form in 45 cities in the United States. But be it understood that where either of these forms of administration are in force the populations are very small, with the exception of Dayton, Ohio, which has a population of about 120,000.

Conditions in Canada are somewhat different to those in the United States. There has always been a better public spirit in the Dominion, though not by any means so large as it might be, and we yet fail to see that the aldermanic system is a complete failure. We believe that it is not the success it should be because of the absence of a proper check on the one hand and on the other any public spirit we might have is divided. We frankly admit that the Commission form where it has been tried has been a success generally but we do maintain that it is because of the personnel, rather than the system. This brings us back to our opening. We welcome this new public interest in civic problems. This is the great hope for the future of municipal government in Canada. As that interest grows so will the reformers realize the responsibility of their thrusting new theories on the electorate. More common sense will prevail; municipal executives will feel that their labour is better appreciated and real civic reformers will know that their studied propagandas for the good of the community will have a better chance of being tried out. It is a bigger and truer civic spirit that is wanted in this country, not so many innovations that will destroy that spirit.