

## Federal District of Ottawa

Ex-Mayor FRED COOK, M.J.I., Ottawa.

An interesting *causerie* on municipal topics was given by Mr. Fred. Cook, M. J. I., Ex-Mayor of Ottawa, at the first social gathering of the year of the Canadian Division of the Institute of Journalists, held in Montreal. Mr. Cook's experience, gained by many years' service in municipal life; his wide knowledge of Canadian conditions; his acquaintanceship with all the public men of the Dominion by reason of his thirty years' consecutive occupancy—the record for Canada—of a seat in the Parliamentary Press Gallery, admirably qualify him to speak as an authority on "Municipal Problems." While some may not agree with Mr. Cook's conclusions, yet, we think, he did a service to Canada in emphasizing the difference in conditions between the cities of Canada and the United States, and in urging caution before adopting forms of civic Government, which, while finding fertile ground across the boundary, might not be so well suited to the soil of the Dominion. The chair was occupied by the Editor of this Journal, who is Chairman of the Canadian division, and there was an excellent attendance of the representative newspaper men and women of Montreal.

Mr. Cook said a journalist was usually regarded as a walking encyclopaedia; he was supposed to know something about everything. Many of those present, at different times in their professional capacity, were brought into contact with civic legislators. He thought it well, therefore, to talk to them on municipal affairs with special reference to the creation of the proposed "Federal District of Ottawa." The movement had its inception in a suggestion to adopt for Ottawa what is known as the Commission form of government. There was no phase of politics, taking the wider definition of the term as "the science of government," that went more closely home than effective civic administration—pure water, pure air, clean streets, good transportation municipally—all those matters that came close to the citizen. Aside altogether from this phase, there was the aesthetic aspect, such as town-planning, widening of streets, construction of buildings, driveways and parkways, the establishment of playgrounds, and generally the removal of civic eyesores.

Those who followed municipal affairs would admit that one of the most remarkable developments in the past ten or twelve years on this continent is the establishment of the Commission form of Government, as distinct from the old type of elective council. It started in the city of Galveston, Texas, after the great tidal wave of 1900, which overwhelmed the city, and five years' later was adopted by Houston. From Texas the movement spread northward to Dakota, westward to California, eastward to the New England States, until now nearly two hundred cities and towns of the United States are governed by paid commissioners. To a certain extent we in Canada had adopted it in a modified form. There is only one city in the Dominion governed purely and simply with the commission form—St. John, N. B. Other cities had adopted it in the modified form of Boards of Commissioners or Boards of Control, such as in Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa, Winnipeg, Calgary and other places.

The change of government in the cities of the United States is the result of the apathy of the citizens, and, in many instances, the real root of municipal inefficiency is to be found in the lack of interest by the citizens as a whole. Conditions in Canada are largely dissimilar

from those in the United States. Reading and observation with regard to American cities, said Mr. Cook, inclined him to the belief that, apart from the apathy referred to, there is also a revulsion of feeling against the election of men to municipal office by popular vote. By this system a city might get good men, but, on the other hand, officials were often elected to office who were absolutely unfitted for the position to which they were chosen, with the result that there was created a system of graft and maladministration, until the citizens rose in their might and devised a means to restore normal civic conditions. Such maladministration had, in large measure, led to the adoption of this form of civic government in the United States.

Those who had carefully considered forms of municipal government well knew that no particular form could be an absolute panacea for the ills from which cities suffered. At the same time the duty of Canadian legislators should be to select the best features of civic administration and apply them to existing conditions. The methods employed might result in a council so large as to be unwieldy, but, on the other hand, a council might be so small as to make the members dictators, and unless some check were put on these members it might be found difficult to displace them.

In Canadian cities, such as in Montreal, where there is a Board of Control charged with all the administrative duties, and behind them, the City Council, confined absolutely to legislative functions, to his mind, Mr. Cook said there was the ideal form of civic government. The City Council is an admirable training ground for public life. When men are secured for the City Council, and they must be good men, they should be kept in their positions, and an attempt made to preserve continuity of service in municipal life.

There is an unexplained anomaly in the municipal law of Ontario. The Province of Quebec Legislature had wisely given the Montreal Board of Control terms for four years. In Ontario, members of City Councils were allowed to hold office for one year only. The result is that from the day when a City Council is installed, some members commence the hand shaking business for the following year. On the other hand School Boards in Ontario had terms of two years. Mr. Cook could not see why Ontario should not adopt the Quebec method, or even that of the Homeland, where continuity of service was obtained by three-year terms, one-third of the council retiring annually.

After referring in complimentary terms to the part played in Montreal's civic affairs by the press of the city, Mr. Cook said, that in Ottawa, after a meeting of the Board of Trade, some of those interested in the federal scheme had approached the City Council and asked whether or not they thought that, in place of the commission form of government, the time was ripe for the creation of a federal district. As a result, a memorial was submitted to the Government in February of last year, and was now being considered by a sub-committee of the Cabinet.

One of the reasons the movement was suggested for Ottawa was that in all other federal countries of the world,—the United States, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Germany, Venezuela, and the United States of Columbia—the capital city was declared a Federal District. In the memorial submitted to the Dominion Government the request was for a Federal District for Ottawa to include within the boundaries a large area of the surrounding country; the city to be planned, developed, and beautified by a paid commission, partly nominated