

The Standard



Published by The Standard Limited, 22 Prince William Street, St. John, Canada.

SUBSCRIPTION.
Morning Edition, By Carrier, per year, \$5.00
Morning Edition, By Mail, per year, 3.00
Weekly Edition, By Mail, per year, 1.00
Weekly Edition to United States 1.50
Single Copies Two Cents.

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SAINT JOHN, FRIDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 21, 1910

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT BY COMMISSION.

Mr. James H. Hanna, mayor of Des Moines, Iowa, where the plan of government by commission was recently adopted, has written the following article upon the success of the plan. Academic discussions on the merits of this form of civic government have from time to time brought it prominently before the citizens of St. John. Mr. Hanna's article is well worthy of perusal.

The Commission form of municipal government obliterates ward lines, ignores party politics, and abolishes legislative, executive and judicial distinctions.

It substitutes a board consisting of the Mayor and four Commissioners, who manage the affairs of the city as a board of directors would manage the business of a bank or of any other large corporation. They are invested with all the powers of city government, and are elected by the people of the whole city.

These five men divide the duties of the city government among themselves into five departments: Public affairs, accounts and finances, public safety, streets and public improvements, and parks and public property. They then elect all the subordinate officers necessary for the city business, such as chief of police, police judge, city clerk, city engineer, city treasurer, city auditor, etc. These subordinate officers may be discharged at any time. All other subordinates, except common laborers, are selected under civil service rules administered by a Civil Service Commission, and are removable only for misconduct, or lack of attention to duties, or activity in political matters.

The four commissioners and the mayor act as the administrative heads of their respective departments. They also constitute the council and as such legislate for the city.

These five councilmen under the Des Moines plan are elected for a period of two years, and in the following manner:—Any citizen who secures the signatures of twenty-five voters vouching for his character may become a candidate for mayor or commissioner. The two candidates receiving the highest number of votes for mayor at the primary are the candidates for mayor at the election; the eight receiving the highest number of votes for commissioner are the final candidates for commissioners. At the election, which occurs two weeks later, the candidate for mayor who receives the highest number of votes becomes mayor, and the four candidates for commissioner who receive the highest number of votes become commissioners.

At their first meeting, these five elect the subordinate city officers, and the new council is then ready to conduct the business of the city.

It will be seen that directness and simplicity are the main characteristics of the Des Moines plan of commission government.

The great purposes are to make the city officials feel responsive to public opinion, and to enable them to make themselves efficient in administration.

To carry out those two fundamental ideas, two other great principles have dictated nearly all the details of the charter—namely: to confer upon the governing body great power, and to hold it strictly responsible for right uses of its power. Publicity and efficiency are the watchwords of the Des Moines plan.

Candidates must make a public statement of their campaign expenses; there can be no secret meetings of the city council; every ordinance appropriating money must be on public file for seven days before it becomes effective; all franchises must be submitted to a vote of the people for approval before they become operative; and officers must be under no secret obligations to public service companies in the way of passes, special rates, or free services.

These specific provisions for publicity have created a general spirit that demands the bringing of everything in connection with the city government out into the open. Campaigns are conducted practically altogether in open meetings, hundreds of which occur in every city election; and every meeting of the city council is minutely reported in the daily newspapers. The result is that public opinion, well informed and intelligent, moulds the action of the city council.

The power of this public opinion is rendered still more effective by provisions for an essential part of the Des Moines plan—the Initiative, the Referendum, and the Recall.

Having thus provided for intelligent, active and effective public opinion, making the city government responsible to the people for its every act, the next thing of importance, indeed the great object, is to give it the means of efficient administration. It is therefore invested with every power incident to city government—legislative, executive and judicial—so that there can be no excuse for inefficiency.

Prompt, efficient, business-like administration of municipal affairs is the natural result. When you have intelligent public opinion stimulating a business-like administration of common affairs, isn't that something like the fulfillment of the prophecy of democracy?

Now, how does this novelty in municipal government work out in practice?

It has been tried in Des Moines only a little more than two years, and circumstances during that time have hampered the new form of government more or less. Yet it has undoubtedly been a great improvement—indeed, an almost incalculable improvement—upon the old form.

The administration has been prompt, and the city has been cleaned up physically and morally far beyond the old order. Permanent improvements have been secured to an extent not even approached in the past. And all has been done upon a tax levy ranging from

8 mills to 4.2 mills less than during the eight preceding years. To be exact, the levy during the two years of the Des Moines plan has averaged 2.7 mills less than it averaged under the old plan during the eight years preceding.

To be sure, there has been a great civic awakening in Des Moines, and to this some observers may ascribe the improvements, upon the theory that "a new broom sweeps clean." But the fact is that one of the chief merits of the Des Moines plan is its effect in fixing popular attention upon public affairs, and thereby tending to arouse and sustain popular civic interest.

Under the new plan, the average citizen of Des Moines takes personal pride in his city government. Under the old plan, it was customary to criticize, or to speak apologetically, or to avoid the subject. This could not promote alertness. Ninety-five per cent. of the citizens of Des Moines are thoroughly satisfied that the change of two years ago was a good change. They would not go back to the old form under any consideration.

THE NEXT UNITED STATES CONGRESS.

The New York Herald, which has long been noted for preparing its election forecasts dispassionately, has been gathering information and studying the political situation throughout the United States, and sums up its conclusions in regard to the probabilities in the impending Congressional elections as follows:—

Democratic members of the next House, 141; Republican members, 132; doubtful 118.

In the doubtful list, 82 places are now held by Republicans and 36 are held by Democrats.

There are 217 Republicans and 174 Democrats in the present House, making a Republican majority of thirty-three. If the Democrats can hold the places they now possess, they need gain but seventeen places to win control of the next House.

Says the New York Herald:—"The plain inference from these figures would be that at the outset of the campaign the Republican party is showing a disposition to go to pieces and prepare for the worst whipping it has had in many years. It must be admitted, however, that even as this article is being prepared there are signs here and there throughout the country that the Republicans are recovering from their panic. The buoyancy of the Democracy is not quite so apparent. It is going to be a battle royal anyway."

The Herald goes on to point out that not only is the control of the House of Representatives at stake in the elections next month, but the control of the Senate may also be involved. The Republicans now have on paper twenty-six majority in the upper chamber at Washington, but this includes from seven to twelve Senators classified as insurgents, who frequently vote with the Democrats. Of the thirty-one senators whose terms expire and whose seats must be filled by State Legislatures to be elected this fall twenty-four are Republicans.

It is easily probable that by the time the next Senate is ready for organization after March 3 next there may be enough new Democrats and new insurgents in office to turn over completely the control of that body. Thus far the election of a Democrat to succeed Hale of Maine is assured, while there will be insurgent senators to succeed Flint of California, Burrows of Michigan and Piles of Washington.

ENCOURAGING.

A member of the Canadian Methodist board of missions said something in meeting the other day, which was duly reported in the papers. When he read the statement in cold type he was sure he had been misreported, and so stated the case at the next session.

In this there is nothing unusual or surprising. Not a day passes but some man declares the same thing. Indeed, if we were to credit all the condemnations of this sort that we hear about the poor newspaper reporter we would believe scarcely anything we read in the papers.

But in this particular case there did happen something both unusual, and surprising. An official stenographic reporter was at the meeting, and to him the aggrieved gentleman appealed for vindication. The reporter turned back to his notes, found the spot and read—substantially what had appeared in the papers.

And what is the moral of this little tale? asks the Hamilton Spectator in commenting on the incident. Simply this:—That as we know the average reporter he is not the blockhead these protesting public men would have us believe, and that if it were possible to refer more frequently to official stenographic records, it would happen that the reporter more often than the speaker would be vindicated.

Another thing the incident suggests is that there are very many speakers, who say more than they intend to, and more than it is wise for them to say, forgetful or careless of the fact that there is always the newspaper with its cold type record, and the day after, to be reckoned with. But the particularly encouraging feature in this case is that it demonstrates that after all it is just possible the reporter may be right and the other fellow wrong.

NET PROFITS 300 PER CENT.

Automobile owners everywhere must have read with interest a recent announcement that a certain company which manufactures automobile parts and accessories made net profits of 300 per cent. a year for the last three years. They have known that the rubber tires they are compelled to buy show an enormous profit, and they feel sure that cars which now sell for \$4,500 or \$5,000 and cost the makers only \$1,800 when they leave the factory, could be retailed for \$2,000 to the advantage of purchaser and seller, if the big agents' profits were cut down and less money spent on costly buildings. Gradually there will be a readjustment in the automobile world, which has had a tremendous inflation similar to that which went on among bicycle makers when the bicycle craze was at its height.

Low-priced cars are certain of a steady market, for the automobile has come to stay; but the higher priced cars have not quite so plain sailing before them, if certain signs of the times are any indication. Already, for instance, tops and other appurtenances are being given without extra charge, thus reducing the price of the car by perhaps \$200. When still further reductions are made, the trade will profit by it and reach a normal permanent basis. Just as soon as tires and appurtenances can be bought at reasonable rates and other expenses of up-keep reduced, many people will buy cars who are now deterred, not by the first cost, but by the subsequent heavy expenditure. Meanwhile, it is gratifying to note that the product of the shops steadily improves; the cars now being built are simpler and better in almost every way.

Current Comment

(London Free Press.)

The Sons of Temperance in Nova Scotia carried out the very original idea of having an educative temperance exhibit at the provincial fair. It was pointed out that there never was any lack of exhibits of temperance.

(Cincinnati Commercial Tribune.)

"Joy cometh in the morning," chants the hymn writer. Not every morning.

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MR. PUGSLEY'S NOTABLE BACK-DOWN.

(Halifax Herald.)

The Laurier organs have been trying to represent that in the recent settlement of the suit brought by G. S. Mayes against the Dominion government for dredging the government had scored a victory and proved Mr. Mayes to be greatly in the wrong in his claims and contentions.

But the fact is that in that settlement the government and Mr. Pugsley made a most notable back-down, and paid nearly \$10,000, though they had previously declared in their recorded defense that not one cent was due Mr. Mayes, and furthermore that he had been guilty of the offense of inducing an engineer to make a false return as to the amount of dredging done.

Mr. Mayes had brought suit for \$62,871, and so far as is known to this day that may have been the correct amount.

As to a certain item or balance of \$5090, part of the plaintiff's or supplier's claim, the government or Mr. Pugsley had pleaded that "no amount whatever was due to the said plaintiff as the supplier well knew."

At a subsequent time the government amended its plea so as to add also a charge against Mayes of having tampered with the engineers in making their report of the quality of dredging done.

But in making this famous or infamous settlement, the government or Mr. Pugsley, abandoned the plea that "no amount whatever was due," and also the charge against Mr. Mayes, and agreed to pay him that very item of \$5090 and also a further sum of \$4660.

For such a notable back-down on Mr. Pugsley's part, the public may well seek some explanation.

"The question will naturally be asked," says the St. John Standard, "Why did the Crown abandon its defense that this amount of \$5090 was not due to Mr. Mayes and subsequently agree to pay it in full? Why make Mr. Mayes a gift of \$5090 to which he was not entitled? There can be only one answer, as The Standard stated yesterday, Mr. Pugsley and his friend George McAvity, who was subpoenaed by Mr. Mayes on the previous day, were not prepared to go on the stand and submit to cross-examination by Mr. Mayes."

Mr. Pugsley capitulated. The whole groundwork of the defense was swept away to save a desperate situation. Mr. Pugsley has no love for Mr. Mayes. There was no question of an amicable settlement. It was imperative. There can be no other explanation. Mr. Pugsley's "victory" consisted in winning away from the witness stand.

As to the rest of the Mayes claim, that could not be legally established with the certificate of the engineer and that certificate Mr. Mayes contended, the engineer improperly withheld.

ANOTHER "VINDICATION."

(Toronto News.)

Mr. Pugsley, the able minister of public works, has had another of his periodical "vindications." Generators Mr. Pugsley claims a "vindication" when the advantage is with his opponents. In the case of G. S. Mayes vs. the King, this rule is not transgressed.

Mr. Mayes will be remembered as the dredging contractor, who secured government work at 55c a cubic yard as the result of an agreement to pay George McAvity 5 cents a yard. Mr. McAvity was the head of the Liberal organization in St. John, and the implication is that the 5 cents was a bribe for the party campaign fund. This suspicion was heightened by the statement that before the contract was awarded, Mr. Mayes had offered to do the same work at 50 cents a cubic yard but his tender had not been accepted. Altogether Mr. McAvity received about \$34,000. The Opposition in Parliament charged the government to take action for the recovery of this money, but the ministers declined, saying that the government had no claim.

Mr. Mayes sued the government for \$5090 balance due on his contract, and various other claims amounting in all to \$62,871. Only the first named item had a political significance. Mr. Mayes said that Mr. Pugsley had refused to pay him this \$5090 until he had settled with McAvity.

The case came before Judge Casals of the exchequer court, but was not tried, the judging urging the parties to make a compromise. After some hours of discussion between counsel it was announced that Mr. Mayes had accepted \$9750 in settlement. Judgment therefore was entered for this amount, the government to pay costs.

On recommendation of Mr. Pugsley the government accepted the claim of \$5090. The balance of \$4660 related to other claims. Mr. McAvity had been subpoenaed, but as the government backed down on the important point his evidence was not heard. It might have been interesting.

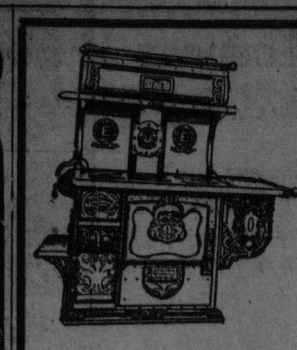
But so long as Mr. Pugsley is "vindicated" again why should we complain?

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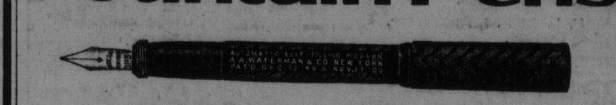
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MISSION FUNDS FOR MARITIME PROVINCES

Toronto, Oct. 20.—The Board of Missions of the Methodist church of Canada, which has been in annual session here for some days, brought business to a close last night, after adopting a resolution condemning the participation of Indians in spectacles and parades at fairs in the Province of Alberta and elsewhere. The following along with other appropriations to various conferences for the year were made: New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, \$13,487; Nova Scotia, \$15,536; Newfoundland, \$24,460.

MONTREAL POLITICIANS BANDY WORDS IN COURT.

Montreal, Oct. 20.—Two well known Liberal French Canadian politicians figured in an episode in the court today. Senator Belque is suing Le Nationalist for libel and Horace Gervais, M.P., was called as a witness for the prosecution. Mr. Belque asked Mr. Gervais if he had inspired the article in question. The reply was: "No, I have other things to do besides concerning myself with your personality. You insult me." As Mr. Gervais left the court room, he said to Mr. Belque: "Good morning, insult!"

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