

# The Work of the Canadian Municipalities

**Annual Convention Held Last Week in City of Victoria—  
Aims and Objects of Union as Outlined by Honorary  
Secretary, Mr. W. D. Lighthall, K.C., of Montreal.**

The Union of Canadian Municipalities held its annual convention in Victoria from July 8th to 11th, the meetings being held in the board rooms of the Empress Hotel. In view of the long distances of most of the municipalities in Canada from Victoria, the convention was not as large as it was hoped or expected, but nearly one hundred delegates participated in the proceedings. In view of the nearness of British Columbia municipalities to the convention city, the provincial representation was large, and took a prominent part in the discussions.

The work of the Union is well described in the report of the secretary, Mr. W. D. Lighthall, K.C., of Montreal, who has been honorary secretary for the past fourteen years and is largely responsible for the present efficient organization. The report follows:—

“It seems almost incredible that this should be our fifth War convention. It is needless to speak of the general facts of the war itself, but in so far as it has affected us Canadian municipalities, we have had grave and considerable problems thrust upon us, and the end is not yet. We should, first of all, be thankful that our problems have never been those of the ancient city of Ypres, nor of Peronne, ruined, destroyed and captured, nor like those of Lille, with her inhabitants largely carried into slavery; nor like those of Brussels and Antwerp, robbed of immense sums, and ground under the heel of the oppressor; but that our brave men, with others of the civilized nations, have kept such horrors, indignities and losses far from us all these years.

“Still, we have had much to think about in loss of population, stagnation of industries, partial paralysis of our financing, and, above all, the necessity of co-operating with every effort vital to the needs of the Empire and of civilization. Our mayors have turned recruiting agents on a large scale; many of our municipal leaders have donned khaki and some of them have paid the penalty of courage on the field of battle. When the first news of the war fell upon us at our convention in August, 1914, at Sherbrooke, we did not know where we were nor where we would be. The first problem that confronted us was how to deal with the universal panic on the stock markets. In 1915 we were obliged to postpone the kind invitation of the city of Victoria, and even to forego holding a convention of any kind, and could only substitute for it an unsatisfactory general executive meeting at Niagara Falls. In 1916, we had grown to see our way more clearly, and took up satisfactorily many current questions of finance and organization at the Montreal convention. In 1917 we had begun to get on our feet, and the London convention was on the whole a good one, and produced several effective measures, of which perhaps the principal was our resolution pledging all the municipal machinery of the country to support the Government in all its measures, which it might consider that our assistance would be of value.

“Perhaps the best element in our action was the feeling in Government circles that we were with them, and loyally behind them, in their strenuous labors to support our soldiers at the front and prosecute the war. This year we ought to be able to take vigorous action on preparation for after-the-war problems. These preparations ought emphatically to be made now, and not left to drift. They should include a plan of financing, a programme of town planning and a definite outline of action, founded resolutely on the determination that we must enter upon a new career of energetic progress and enterprise. This unquestionably should be a spirit of Canada after the war. A large place must be given to the returned soldier question in its widest aspects, and also to selected immigration. The cities and towns must take a more businesslike and systematic interest in all that pertains to the development of their tributary regions. Agricultural

banks and agricultural institutes, and the rendering of farm life attractive, should all be elements in the programme. May I be permitted to again urge the appointment of a cost of living tribunal, similar to the railway board, which is every day more necessary if the citizen is to cope with the heavy burdens that will rest upon him arising out of the cost of the war.

“The spirit of our last convention was worthy of the immense and vital interests which are in the hands of our municipal governors and will, I am sure, be carried on into this. We owe our apologies, or rather explanations, to the city of Victoria for having postponed from year to year, from 1914 to the present, the acceptance of its hospitable invitation, but the difficulties in organizing a convention at one end or the other of Canada during the war can only be appreciated by the central office of the Union, and for this reason we have been continually hoping for the end of the struggle; we feel glad that we have at last seen our way clear to stand once more within this beautiful city and to give ourselves up to its hospitalities and all its charms, as well as to meet the special present problems of the West face to face. There is one element of our work which is sometimes overlooked, which we consider very important, namely, the annual and other executive meetings of the Union in Ottawa during the parliamentary session. These always bring us in close contact with questions in which legislation touches closely the interest, either of the whole of the municipalities or of several of them singly. We are enabled there to meet with the Dominion Cabinet and the most active members of Parliament representing all parts of Canada, and to bring to their attention the views and interests of places as widely scattered as the Dominion. One of the most important resolutions of the last convention, as stated above, was our resolution offering the Government the general support of all the municipal machinery of Canada for war purposes. This was taken advantage of by the Dominion Government in several ways, of which we might specify as an example that the fish committee of the Canada Food Board was put into communication with active municipal men everywhere, with highly satisfactory results. We also circularized the municipal authorities in a manner which we think considerably lightened the immense task of the Canada Registration Board. One of the most important matters of the year at Ottawa has been the continued consolidation of the Railway Act. This is of the utmost importance to all our municipalities. Many years ago we had obtained, after bitter fights before Parliament against all kinds of franchise companies and all kinds of charter sharks, the adoption of certain ‘standard clauses’ which are inserted in every new charter of electric light and telephone companies, and which are carefully worded to impose the necessity of municipal consent before the erection of poles or wires in, under, over, or along any highway, square or public place, and the consent must be imposed by by-law and be upon the terms and conditions stated in the by-law.

“We have had the greatest trouble with the Senate during the past session over the question, a strong group of Senators having insisted on striking out the expression of municipal consent by by-law. If this deletion were permitted it would bring us back to the days of which we once had experience, when any kind of a nod or a wink by anybody around the city hall, or even a silence, was interpreted as a sufficient consent. Our municipal delegations during the year have, however, revived their old fighting spirit, and by appeals to the Government and the House of Commons have so far prevented the will of these Senators from prevailing, and the House of Commons seems disposed, as a whole, to stand by us and by popular rights in the matter. Similar action was attempted by the same Senators in changing the definition of ‘lands’ in the Act to include in it ‘easements,’ the effect of which would be very troublesome and injurious