

The Municipal World

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In the Interests of every department of the Municipal Institutions of Ontario.

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County Councils.

The most important municipal amendment passed at the recent session of the Legislature is that relating to the constitution of county councils. Very little attention appears to have been paid to it and published reports of discussions in reference thereto were brief. The present constitution of county councils was determined by the Act of 1896. This was the result of some years of careful investigation on the part of the late Premier Hardy and some members of the present Government, and it was then thought to be the only feasible scheme. Every phase of the question was considered and the best plan adopted. No particular objection was raised to the Act which appeared to work well except in two or three instances where it was found impossible to form districts out of adjoining municipalities. There was no popular agitation for the change. The amendments just passed were not taken seriously when introduced; they appeared to be an echo of the arguments advanced in 1896 when the alternative plan now proposed was found to be objectionable. We will be pleased to receive the opinions of our subscribers in reference to the amendments, so that all may become acquainted with the question and effect of the new law which provides that the county councils of local municipalities within a county may by resolution declare that it is expedient that the council of such county shall be composed of the reeves of the townships and villages and the mayors of towns not separated from the county, instead of representatives of the county council divisions constituted under the present Act, where a majority of the councils of the local municipalities pass resolutions and proper notice thereof

is given to the county clerk, it will not be necessary to hold elections for county councillors, and thereafter county councils shall be composed of the mayors and reeves.

A new feature is that when voting on questions involving the expenditure of more than \$1,000 for any purpose, a mayor or reeve shall count in proportion to the equalized value of his municipality. A correspondent in the present issue directs attention to other matters more important than the expenditure of money. The question of changing the present system should not be hastily considered. A session of the Legislature will be held before the Act can go into operation in any county, this gives every opportunity for a full discussion and consideration of desirable amendments.

Communication.

To the Editor of the Municipal World:

SIR—The County Council Amendment Act upon which you invite criticism should be filed away as a curious legislative freak.

The opponents of the existing system of county representation are in the habit of claiming that owing to the severance of the connection between the local and county councils, interest in the former has diminished almost to vanishing point and that consequently it is now almost impossible to secure live men to fill the positions of local councillors.

The amending Act which apparently voices the sentiments of this opposition provides that the proposed sweeping changes in county representation shall be affected by resolutions passed by a majority of the local councils in any county. But if the opponents of the existing system are correct in their statements, the local councils being composed of persons, who may almost be said to have been pitchforked into office, would scarcely represent the true feelings of the community. It does not therefor appear reasonable for this and other apparent reasons, to place this power in the hands of the local councils.

The amending Act proposes to substitute for the existing system of county representation, the reeves of townships and villages, and the mayors of towns, giving to each member of a county council, thus constituted, equal voting power on all questions whatever, (affecting current annual expenditure) and, in fact, on all questions whatever, which do not involve an expenditure of over \$1,000.

It will be remembered that prior to 1897, whilst the smaller municipalities were each represented in county council by their reeve or mayor, the fair proportion of representation was secured to the larger township municipalities by means of one or more deputy reeves in proportion to their population.

Questions of considerable importance (such as the equalization of assessments) not directly involving any expenditure of

money will often arise, and the expenditures of large sums for annual current expenses (such as for the repairs of county roads) are liable to be required. Yet the amended Act in respect to these is framed with an utter disregard of the well recognized principles of representative government and makes no provision for securing a fair representation for, or for protecting the interests of the larger municipalities. Nor does the 'local option' feature of the amending Act render such omission more excusable. To argue that a local option to commit suicide would be unobjectionable, because no sane person would take advantage of it, would be equally reasonable.

When this matter was before the legislature, it was reported in the press that if the amending Act became law a certain prominent western county would eagerly adopt the new system. But municipal statistics furnish the information that this county comprises (beside 2 towns,) 15 townships and 6 villages. Under the amending Act the 15 township reeves (taking the average) would each represent a population of 3,000 and \$1,600,000 of assessed property, whilst the six village reeves would each represent between 500 and 600 of population, and \$12,000 of assessed property. Between the certain ills under the existing Act, from which this county would flee however serious they may appear, and the uncertain ills which would be evolved from the amending Act, this county looks to be between the 'devil and the deep blue sea'. In taking the benefit of the option, it may go farther and fare worse!

The amending Act further provides that on any question involving an expenditure in excess of \$1,000 for any purpose other than the "annual current expenses" of the municipality the value of each member's vote shall be based upon the amount of equalized assessment which he represents. This provision is open to several objections. Difficulties may easily arise in determining whether a proposed expenditure comes under the head of "current annual expenses" or otherwise. Further, a numerical majority if so disposed, would have little difficulty in dividing up or otherwise manipulating a proposed expenditure although in excess of \$1,000, in such manner as to over-ride a majority in value of the members of a council, and thus effectually dispose of such little protection as even this provision proposes to provide for the larger municipalities.

EDWARD KENRICK,
Co. Councilor, Wentworth Co.

Mr. John J. Fair, Jr., of Millbrook, has been appointed clerk of the township of Cavan, to succeed Mr. Geo. Sootheran.

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Mr. John H. Kean Jr. has been appointed clerk of the village of Tiverton, in the place of Mr. G. S. Evans.

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Mr. J. D. Harkness, of the "Spectator" has been appointed clerk of Palmerston in succession to Mr. Geo. F. Downie.