

In the final report of the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons on the Constitution in 1972, it was recognized that municipal government "requires a new focus of attention and more effective means of presenting its point of view to the two senior levels of government." The Federation of Canadian Municipalities specifically urged at its annual conference last year that municipalities be assigned certain powers to be scheduled in the constitution, and the resources to give weight to those powers. It said:

Suggestions for enhancing the status of municipalities under any new constitutional arrangement should be based on the principle that municipalities, in the first instance ought to be assigned those powers which experience has indicated are best exercised at the local level—We call for an urgent re-examination of the roles and responsibilities of our three levels of government, as well as the sources of revenue that go along with them, so that we may reshape our Confederation into one which fits the facts and realities of our present day. We believe, that this nation's strength can be enhanced, not lessened, by a re-assessment and re-assignment of the proper roles of each level of government, including local governments.

It is strange that no mention was made of the role of the municipalities in the report of the Task Force on Canadian Unity. The federal-provincial conferences on the constitution have focused on equitable revenue-sharing between their two levels of government, ignoring the municipal problem. It appears that our modern-day version of the Fathers of Confederation, the first ministers, are repeating the error of a century ago.

The city of Edmonton illustrates the kind of change which has occurred in the urban areas in the past century. Edmonton has become the fourth largest city in Canada. Over the past five years the city has grown 15 per cent. This means that the city has a responsibility to provide services to half a million people—services like the police and fire department, libraries, parks and recreation, transportation, water and sanitation. These services are the most vital ones to city-dwellers, since they are what makes a safe and healthy community. Of all levels of government, the municipal government is the one closest to its citizens in their daily lives.

Besides servicing an expanded population, Edmonton has also had to finance the increased technological complexity of those services. The police force has moved into the computer age, a new era in public transit was started with the light rapid transit system and water quality control requires a more efficient sewage treatment process.

At the beginning of this year, Edmonton was faced with a serious dilemma as it drew up its budget for 1979. The city was not able to take account of the revenue from grants because the level of the grants will not be known until April. In order to maintain the existing level of service and keep up with the growth in population, the property tax rate would have to be increased by about 20 per cent. City council, however, had decided that property taxes would not increase beyond 6 per cent. This means a \$10 million shortfall for Edmonton in 1979.

The quality of life in the community—housing, transportation, security—would be affected by any attempt to make up this shortfall. In order to save \$1 million, the fire department would have to operate with 77 less men than planned. To save \$150,000, 10 outdoor rinks would have to be closed by the

parks and recreation department. A cutback of \$100,000 in the social services department would mean the loss of an additional \$400,000 in provincial grants.

The city cannot afford such cuts. The police department is already battling a rising rate of crime, up 62 per cent in the past ten years. In 1978, there were 16 murders in Edmonton, 37 attempted murders and 73 rapes. The number of rapes alone is so serious that Edmonton women have organized in protest.

In the area of transportation, Edmonton has had to raise bus fares by 10 cents in order to get an additional \$3.86 million. Even with this increase the public service will operate with a deficit of \$25.5 million this year. Telephone rates have been increased by 5 per cent to gain an additional \$3 million, one-tenth of which will be taxed by the province anyway. Edmonton has had to nickel and dime itself in order to gain small increases in revenue which do not begin to meet its needs.

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The money shortage has a special effect on one sector of the population—the aged. The proportion of persons over 65 years old is increasing. In Edmonton, the aged will make up 8 per cent of the population in 1986, compared to 6 per cent in 1976. The city will have to bear substantially heavier burdens for social services, health care and housing, since the aged require more of these services than any other age group. In Alberta, people over 65 need twice as much medical treatment.

Not only do the aged have special needs which are met in part by the city, but they are also on a more limited income and therefore less able to pay for what they need. Seventy-six per cent of senior citizens in Canada have an income of less than \$5,000. In order to live, these people need subsidized housing, but in Edmonton this housing is limited because of the influx of migrants seeking jobs who take up the cheaper accommodation until they can afford to move. In other words, people looking for jobs across Canada, because of the high rate of unemployment in other parts of the country, flock to Alberta, specifically northern Alberta and Edmonton, and create an added factor in the housing situation. Rents have also increased with the increased demand for housing. Paradoxically, therefore, the economic boom in the west has adversely affected the aged in some respects because they are not full participants in the increased wealth. This "catch 22" situation in Edmonton reveals the modern problem of a city in the midst of a booming economy.

In order to plan for the growing proportion of senior citizens and the services they will need just to maintain their sense of dignity and independence, the Edmonton social planning section has engaged in some long-range programming. In the words of the report:

Attempts to fill unmet needs, inflation and the expected increase in demand will bring costs to a level substantially greater than would be the case if the present level and types of services were maintained.

Instead of cutbacks, the city of Edmonton needs to ensure that it has the added resources to meet these additional needs.