

THE CANADIAN MUNICIPAL JOURNAL

AND REVIEW OF CIVIC IMPROVEMENT

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THE CONVENTION OF THE U. C. M.

In revising the report of the Convention of the Union of Canadian Municipalities, one matter attracted a good deal of attention and that was the misconception that arose between the delegates about what is so interesting a topic in every municipal gathering, namely "Commission Government."

Unfortunately this expression has been applied to several different methods which now exist in Canada.

Mayor Lavallee spoke of the "Board of Commissioners" in Montreal, and this is the expression in the amendment to the Charter creating the Board. And yet, this Board is the same as the Board of Control that exists in Toronto, Ont., (where it originated) in Winnipeg, Man., Ottawa, Ont., and Halifax, N.S. The English papers in Montreal generally speak of the "Board of Control," and of its members as "Controllers", and they are really correct.

Then Mayor Short, Edmonton, Alta., spoke of the "Commissioners" in that City Government and few understood at first that these are appointed and salaried officials, much as the City Clerk and Engineer are; and might be called "City Managers."

Next Calgary's representative, Ald. May, spoke of his City's Commissioners, who are elected by the City at large, and are really in the same class as "Controllers."

Mayor Galbraith, of Prince Albert, Sask., gave another example of other "Commissioners," in the appointment of the Mayor and the Secretary-Treasurer as "Commissioners," and gave an address on this kind of government.

Now, as a matter of fact, as we have stated previously, the only municipality in Canada working under "Commission Government" as it is properly understood, and as it is being widely adopted in the United States, is the City of St. John, N.B., which adopted it less than a year ago. In this case the Council has been abolished entirely, and the whole city government rests on five "Commissioners," one of whom is the Mayor, who are elected by the citizens at large—that is without the ward system.

It really was no wonder that some of the delegates got mystified and confused when so many varieties of "Commission Government" were discussed, and when a speaker failed, as a rule, to recognize that his form might be peculiar to his own city.

Another feature was the fact that was evident on the part of some was that by listening to a paper, passing a vote of thanks to the writer, and ordering it to be printed in the Official Report, to be printed in the official organ, "The Canadian Municipal Journal," the approval of the Convention was thereby stamped upon the opinions expressed. The President solved this by announcing that the Convention did not hold itself responsible for the opinions expressed in any address, nor in any speech. It was only bound by such Resolutions as were passed expressing the opinions or the wishes of the delegates.

It was very satisfactory to note how promptly some unwise attempts to bring in a party aspect, were put down by the President, such utterances being ordered to be expunged from the minutes.

As on previous occasions, the discussions on the papers proved very interesting, and a large amount of general information was supplied by the various speakers who took up the prepared addresses.

It was unfortunate that so many of the numerous subjects given in the programme were not even touched upon, and great credit is due to Mr. T. Aird Murray, C.E., and Mayor Oliver, of Port Arthur, for giving such interesting impromptu addresses on "Sewerage" and "Pavements." In the case of the former, a valuable contribution was to be expected, but Mayor Oliver's speech showed how very clearly he knew what was being done in his own city.

It was again noticed that a great deal of the real value of the Convention lay in the talks round the meal tables, where experiences and practical information were exchanged. The addresses and the discussions on them, valuable as they are, were not by any means the total good of the friendly meetings of municipal men from all over Canada.

A suggestion was made after the Convention had closed that the Union should be divided into two sections, an Eastern and a Western one, perhaps meeting at the same time and discussing certain questions in joint session.

This, however, would do away with one valuable feature of the Union, namely the fostering of a truly Canadian spirit by the meeting of men from all over the Dominion, who thus learn much about their common country, its needs and possibilities.

Now is there any need for a divided Union?

Most of the questions of municipal activity are common to every place in Canada, whether on the prairies or the sea-coast. The questions of the form of government, taxation, water supply and sewage disposal, police and courts, fire protection and many others are of common interest, though some variations due to local conditions may arise.

True there are questions which are purely local, such for instance, as Hail Insurance. But these can all be very properly referred to the Provincial Municipal Unions, and this has been the way in which such matters have been treated by the Federal Union.

It would be, we believe, a fatal mistake to take any step in the direction of lessening the all-Canadian character of the Union.

One of the pleasantest features was the absolute friendliness which was so apparent, and the belief that the Union was a Canadian organization, working for no one section of the country, but for the whole Dominion.