

The Commercial

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CIVIC GOVERNMENT.

What is agitating Winnipeggers who take an interest (as all good citizens should) in civic affairs, more even than matters of taxation, is the proposal to institute a new system of civic government. At a meeting of aldermen held a few weeks ago, a report was presented by the mayor, favoring a plan of government by civic commission, or rather we might say, a mixed form of government, partly by commission and partly by a board of aldermen. The question has since been under the consideration of the legislative committee, occasional meetings having been held for the discussion of the matter.

The plan first proposed by the mayor, was that a chief official be appointed, on the recommendation of the council, for a term of five years, who would have supervision of all departments, under direction of an executive committee of two, the latter composed of the mayor and a member of the council. The council would select one of its members for the executive committee, while the mayor, of course, would be elected directly by the people. The executive committee and the chief official would each receive a good salary. The council would continue as at present, with the same authority over receipts and expenditures. The executive would, under this plan have a similar relation to the council, that a government has to parliament. By a two-thirds vote, the council, according to the plan proposed, would have the power of passing the veto upon the acts of the executive.

At the first meeting of the legislative committee of the council, a resolution was passed endorsing the principle of the proposed change in the plan of civic government. It was also resolved that the proposed chief official, to be known as the general superintendent, should be appointed by the judges of the court of Queen's bench, for a period of five years.

There can be but one opinion as to the present plan of civic government. Civic business under the existing system is not conducted with that promptitude and business ability which is given to the affairs of large firms and companies. This is not to be wondered at. What is everybody's business is nobody's business. What the city is lacking now is executive authority, confined to and continuously giving attention to civic matters. A large business corporation could never be successfully conducted by one or more persons, who had their time almost continually taken up with other important interests, and who were able to give but a few moments now and again to the affairs of the company. Failure would be certain in a short time. How, then can we expect the affairs of the city, important and diversified as they are, to be successfully and economically managed. Under the present plan of electing aldermen for a short term, they hardly have time to become acquainted with civic matters, before they must give place to new men. Besides it is practically impossible to secure men, who have their own private affairs to look

after, to give the time and attention required to civic matters. Business men have not the time to do it, and we have not here men of leisure who are competent for the work. As a result, civic affairs are conducted with a looseness which would ruin a firm or company of an ordinary commercial nature.

We can hardly doubt, but that the principle of the proposed plan, if carried into effect, would make a great improvement over the existing order of things. All that would be necessary is to secure the right men, and there should be no difficulty in securing thoroughly competent and trustworthy men to take charge of the city's affairs, if a reasonable inducement be offered. A penny wise and pound-foolish policy should not be pursued. If city affairs were in the hands of a few men of the right stamp, they would certainly be able to save large sums annually which are now wasted, and a few thousand dollars here or there in the item of salaries, should not be for a moment considered. Besides, the promptitude and greater efficiency in which the city's business would be conducted, even if there were no saving in expenditures in other directions, would repay amply for the extra salary required to secure the right kind of men.

Under the proposed plan, the council would be merely a legislative body. This change seems a good one. It is easier to legislate than to carry out legislation. It is in the practical work, rather than the legislative, that the failure is most apparent under the present system. It is not such a difficult matter to get a number of intelligent men together to discuss and adopt legislative measures in a satisfactory manner. But it is the time and personal attention required to carry out all these measures in practice, which aldermen who have their own affairs to look after, will not do. Herein is where the city suffers most severely now. Under the proposed plan, the executive would step in at the right time and continue the work of the council to a successful issue. The executive, by being thoroughly familiar with city matters, and having plans properly prepared and laid out, could greatly simplify and expedite the work of the council. The executive and general superintendent should not be appointed for too limited a period. The right men, once familiarized with the work, would do better for the city than making frequent changes. The same thing should apply to the council, in their legislative capacity, even with an executive to assist them. The main thing is to select the right men, and then not change them shortly after they become familiarized with their position.

Remarks are occasionally made about men sacrificing time and business to look after civic matters. It is a common thing to refer to the mayor and aldermen in this way, and it is sometimes said that it is hard to get the right kind of men to sacrifice their own interests for the good of the city. This is one of the mistakes of the present system. Why should the city require any of its citizens to sacrifice their own personal interests for the public good? The city is able to pay, and should pay. Those who talk about sacrificing so much for the city, are the ones who are likely to sacrifice the least. If the

idea of securing men to look after civic affairs, at a sacrifice of personal matters were abandoned, and the proper men secured in a business way, we wager the city would be the gainer immensely thereby, not only in the greater efficiency with which city business would be done, but also in direct saving in expenditures.

Some exception may be taken to the plan proposed by the mayor, for the future government of the city, without condemning the principle. It is about as certain as anything can be, that the city would be vastly the gainer by having its affairs placed in the hands of two or three of the right kind of men, for practical management. Under such a plan, however, as the one outlined, it would seem unnecessary to continue the full board of aldermen as at present. A reduction in the number of aldermen to say half the present number, would appear to meet all requirements. Six good men with the mayor should answer as a legislative body very well and even better than if half a dozen more were added, provided the latter included some undesirable persons. There would be more care and greater interest in electing a board of six, than if the number were doubled. Present ward boundaries, now a cause of frequent petty squabbles and jealousies in the council, could very well be abolished, and have aldermen elected by popular vote of the whole city. It has also been proposed with reason, that the aldermen should be elected on a basis of representation in proportion to taxation, say large tax payers to elect one-third of the number, moderate tax payers to elect another third, and small property holders the remaining third.

MORE COAL DISCOVERIES.

The recent discovery of coal in the Prince Albert district is a matter of very great importance to a large section of country. If the deposit is at all as valuable as expected, it is a matter upon which the people of all Manitoba and adjacent country may be congratulated. A few years ago, the fuel supply of Western Canada was considered a question of the greatest moment. Forest areas were limited to certain districts, while vast stretches of country were without any adequate supply of wood fuel. It was recognized that wood fuel could not be depended upon to supply the country for any great time in the future. Local supplies of wood in many districts, it was recognized, would not last long after any considerable settlement had been made. The cost of procuring and transporting wood is very great. Though there are extensive areas of wood country to the north and east of the great prairie region, it is apparent that wood fuel from these forest regions could not be supplied to all parts of the prairie region, except at a cost which would make its use almost prohibitory. The supply of wood fuel in the aggregate is vast enough to supply the country's wants as far ahead as it is at present necessary to look, but it is not so distributed as to become a convenient and economical fuel for the country at large.

The discovery of vast coal beds in the west, greatly relieved the anxiety regarding the fuel supply of the future. As these discoveries went on, it was finally decided that the fuel question had been favorably solved. There re-