

COMMISSION GOVERNMENT—(Continued)

have an election. If there is still not enough the second last man is taken out. Although in one of my elections I had a large vote myself, I had to go to three votes before I was finally elected. This is not the same as proportional representation. You could not apply proportional representation to one office."

President.—"It would be interesting to compare the two systems, your system and that of Mr. Ross. I see Mr. Ross here and he will tell you that the two are not the same thing. Any person here can get a copy of the Spencer Hare Ballot by writing to Toronto University if they desire to follow the subject any further."

Alderman McLagan.—"For how long a period are commissioners elected in that case?"

Mayor Hardie.—"The first election the mayor was elected for four years, Commissioner of Public Utilities for two years, and of Public Works two years. One election was missed, so that the term will be three years, and election for one commissioner each year. The commissioners are not necessarily taken from the citizens of the city, but I do not think our city would employ anyone outside of it. It is not necessary that they should have had previous experience. Myself I have had over thirty years experience in the control of large stores, and I think you can very generally trust the people to get a good man. If given a fair show the people will exercise very good judgment."

Controllers and Council

J. W. NELSON, Controller, Ottawa.

Systems of municipal government for cities in Canada other than that of Mayor and aldermen have not been in use a sufficient time to permit of a pronouncement being made as to which is the best. All have their merits and their defects. The experiments of American cities have not helped much in this regard, but to some extent have had the effect of confusing the problem. But, it is in a search for improvement, in an effort to meet the demand of the ratepayer for something more satisfactory than the old aldermanic system, something that will assure to him a better management of the affairs of the city in which he lives and for the upkeep of which he pays, while at the same time retaining to him the protection of control by ballot, that these new systems are being tried. And while the perfect system has not yet been evolved, certainly a big advance has been made, particularly in the direction most desired — that of providing more business-like and responsible civic government.

In Ottawa we have tried the Board of Control and council system, and I think that perhaps the best way to discuss that system with you is to outline our experience with it, to point to what in my opinion are its strong features and to those that are open to improvement. Ottawa is one of the few cities in Canada where the system is purely board of control and council. The Ottawa system was introduced in 1908, the Mayor and four councillors being elected by the city at large and eighteen aldermen being chosen from the nine wards, two from each. All standing committees of council with the exception of the waterworks committee were abolished and their duties and powers taken over by the board of control. No change was made in this system until July 1 of this year when by special Act of the Legislature passed at the request of the electors expressed through a plebiscite, the waterworks committee was abolished and its functions transferred to the board of control. Now all city's affairs are attended to by the board.

Although, as I said, all systems, not excluding that of the board of control and council, have their faults, the people of Ottawa are better satisfied with the present system than the old aldermanic one. This has been evidenced by their refusal, through a plebiscite, to abandon the board of control system, and by their action this year in doing away with the remnant of the aldermanic committee system. The principal reason for this attitude of the people is, I think, that the board of control form of government gives them, in a measure at least, two of these things which they desired: Representation that is more responsible, and closer attention on the part of their representatives to the business of the municipality.

Under our system, the City Council is becoming more legislative in its functions, while the board of control is attending to the executive work. The relationship of council to the board is much the same as that of parliament to the cabinet. Recently it seems to me there has been a growing tendency on the part of members of council to favor this arrangement, due, I think, to a better realization of the advantages of the board of control system. Aldermen are looking to the board of control to transact the business of the city, reserving to themselves in council, the right to act as a check on the board, a safeguard against mistaken or questionable action.

Under such an arrangement good results should be ob-

tained if each body does its duty properly. The people expect from the controllers greater attention to the business of the city than could be expected from the aldermen. In offering himself for election the candidate for the board of control must be prepared to give this attention. In Ottawa the board meets twice a week, while hardly a week passes that one or more special meetings are not held. Most of the members of the Board are attending to civic business every day.

In order to make possible closer attention to the affairs of the city the board allots to its members special supervision of the various departments — one member gives special attention to city finances, another to the engineering and works department, another to the water works, etc. Although this arrangement is entirely unofficial, it works out satisfactorily. The controllers have no individual authority over their departments, but they hold themselves to a large extent responsible to the electors for their administration, and are therefore more interested in good management. Through this arrangement, also, the board is better able to furnish explanations to council, by which body all its reports must be approved, on points that may be questioned. In the absence of such full and satisfactory explanations, the reports of the board are liable to meet with a disastrous reception at the hands of council.

This brings me back to the part taken by council under our system. The controllers, if they have their work well done, do not hesitate to meet a critical council, providing the criticism is intelligent. I said it is a large part of the duty of council to act as a check on the board of control, just as parliament must be a check on the Government. An intelligently critical council is also a spur to the board. Knowing that their actions and their reports will be closely scrutinized by council, and that note will be made of what is left undone as well as what is done, the controllers are kept on their mettle so to speak.

By our system therefore the controllers, the men who are conducting the city's business, are held closely responsible. They are responsible to council, to which body they must submit their actions twice a month, and they are responsible to the whole city. There can be no question in my mind as to the desirability of this latter responsibility as against the old aldermanic system where the members of council had to report only to their particular wards. The controller must answer to all the electors and ratepayers every year. If his actions have not been what they should have been the people will put him out of office. Under the aldermanic system the men in charge of the city's business might be unsatisfactory to nine-tenths of the city, and yet have sufficient influence in their own wards to secure their return to office. This is strikingly demonstrated by the fact that the lowest vote for a controller polled in Ottawa last January was 4,800, while the lowest vote for an alderman was 244.

However, one can have too much of any good thing, and as I remarked at the outset, there is good and bad in all. I have dwelt on the importance of the fixed responsibility in municipal government which our board of control system insures. There is one drawback in this, and it stands in the way of the best municipal management. The controllers have to go before the electors every year, and in Ottawa as in other cities, it sometimes takes a very little