

Local Government in India

A very interesting discussion is now going on in India in reference to local government. The Indian government recently issued a statement in which it favored an extension of the present system which was introduced thirty years ago by Lord Ripon, to take the place of the "punchayet" or council of five. The punchayet, which is one of the oldest of Indian institutions, being a survival of the time when the village, as the unit of government, was the centre of not only the local social life but discharged the double function of local legislation and administration; and owing to its members being really the best men in the district, in spite of its often drastic measures, it was usually a very efficient body. But the system represented decentralization and did not suit the powers that be, who wanted centralization, and so a local government system with very limited powers was introduced in its place. According to reports, the newer system, which include municipal bodies, local boards and district boards, has proved anything but a success,

and though attempts have been made from time to time to patch it up, the indifference of the native and even the English mind, has been such as to convince the authorities of the futility of carrying on the system in its present form.

What is somewhat strange in the governmental document, but which shows the trend of British democracy even in the government of native races, is its favourable attitude to a revival of the punchayet idea though it, again typically English, raises difficulties in the way of carrying it out. In the meantime, the government announces that it has "decided to accept in almost every case the conclusions of the local government or administration as to the degree of progress possible at the present time," and as these conclusions differ in the various parts of the country, and in many centres are considered an advantage rather than otherwise, it is very evident that variety of system is preferable to uniformity, which is considered in Indian circles as "dull and artificial."

High Standard of Civic Life

The reading of the long annual report of the City of Capetown, South Africa, extracts of which appear on another page in this issue—was a reminder to us of the high standard attained in the civic life of other parts of our Empire. The modest dignity of the language used by the mayor, the sense of responsibility shown in the reports of the municipal officials and the recognition of the importance by the state authorities—as indeed they should be when the best men are proud to serve on the council, as instanced in the case of two knights serving as councilmen—are all indications that the splendid institutions of Great Britain have not lost by distance their strength or their uplifting influence. It would seem that the old system of committee government works satisfactorily in the Union of South Africa for the enlarged city of Capetown—which practically takes in the southern peninsular and which has just been created by a special ordinance of the legislature, though the city itself is two hundred and fifty years of age—is composed of a mayor and forty councilmen; the detail work being in the hands of seven standing committees.

A large part of the report is taken up with the health of the community. This is accounted for by the climatic and racial conditions, which would constitute a grave danger if left alone (those who have had dealings with the colored race know this) and so very precautionary measures have to be taken to ensure even a decent health record, and the fact that the general health of the city is so good is a credit to the diligence of the authorities.

Another part of the report which was particularly interesting to us was the importance that the council of Capetown attached to the convention of the South African Union of Municipalities (which is worked along the same lines as our own) by sending a delegation of five of its principal members with the mayor; and this sense of responsibility is shared by all the other cities in the Union. We in Canada are too prone to look only to the material

benefits to be secured from our Union, one might say, inclined to forget that if the civic life of this country is to be paramount at least some sacrifice is necessary on the part of the individual municipality, and never so much as now, when we read of commissions having to be appointed to enquire into charges of corruption of the body politic of the country, is it necessary for a civic life strong enough and pure enough to convince the world that the public welfare of the Dominion so far as the municipalities were concerned was on as high a standard as the other units of the Empire. Of the honesty of the municipal life of Canada in spite of one or two delinquences—we are convinced—in fact we know—but there is the danger, which always will be, so long as the municipalities live but for themselves alone, of the lowering of the standard to mere commercial values.

A MUNICIPAL RADIAL RAILWAY.

On July 22 was opened in London, Ont., by Mayor Stevenson, the first municipal radial railway in Canada and probably on this continent. The railway which is twenty-three miles long connects the City of London with Lake Erie. It is fully expected that the venture will not only develop the country along the route but will be a financial success.

THE UNION OF CANADIAN MUNICIPALITIES.

The Union of Canadian Municipalities was organized years ago for the protection of every municipality in Canada, and has done invaluable service in having unjust legislation repealed and preventing further encroachments on municipal rights. To secure this, it has representatives watching every Bill as presented.

As municipalities realize what they can accomplish by Union, the membership increases, the power of the Union is enlarged, and more, and better, work is done.

The Union relies upon the municipalities for the whole of its support, and every cent is spent on municipal protection and progress.