

Convention of B. C. Municipalities.—(Continued).

of a body over whose actions they have absolutely no control. The Trustees may do something that is in the opinion of the Superintendent, an infringement of the regulations — in the case of expenditure the Council has to meet it, it has no other option, and to punish the Trustees the Superintendent threatens not to pay the Government Grant, which affects the Council only, making another unforeseen and unfair reduction in the Municipal revenue. It does not seem right that the Councils' financial arrangements should be upset in this manner by the illegal and arbitrary actions of the Superintendent.

In every instance the Statutes are so drawn as to give the Board of School Trustees the advantage and to make the Councils the servants of the Boards. The fault does not lie with the members of the Boards, but with the system. Once more calculated to create friction it were hard to imagine, and that there has not been more is probably due to the impossibility of the Councils obtaining any redress. The members of the School Boards would be more than human, nay almost divine, did they not occasionally yield to the delightful experience of making unlimited expenditures without having to give the slightest consideration as to where the money is to come from. Contrast the extraordinary financial powers of the Board of School Trustees with their executive powers; all they can do is to build and maintain schools and hire teachers. The Council of Public Instruction has jurisdiction over all matters of a purely educational nature and to the Municipal School Inspectors is delegated "supervisory authority in all matters relating to school organization, instruction, and discipline," subject to a further supervision by the Provincial Inspector. See subdivision D., Section 10, Public Schools Act. The appointment of the Municipal School Inspector is also subject to the approval of the Council of Public Instruction. Does the limited authority in one case, warrant the unlimited power possessed in the other?

But some will say that the remedy is in the hands of the ratepayers and that they will settle the matter at the elections. Absolutely true in theory, but in actual practice the Councils are made the goat of the Trustees.

It is quite possible for a Trustee to be re-elected on the strength of having provided a magnificent school in his Ward, while the unfortunate member of the council who had to find the money was defeated. No one, least of all the members of the Municipal Councils, has the slightest desire to, in any way, lower the high standard of education at present obtained throughout the Province, but it should be possible, in some way, to so arrange matters that the party spending should be responsible for finding the money or vice versa.

Now, as to the remedy. It seems to me that there are three methods whereby the present difficulties might be overcome. First, let the School Boards do their own financing. They can use the machinery of the municipalities assessment department and levy and collect their own rate, pay their own bills and be directly responsible for all financial matters. The general public would then have some idea what the cost of education is. At present the average ratepayer only looks at the total of his tax notice and although the various rates are detailed, very rarely is any attention paid to the items. If the total keeps on increasing, how much criticism is directed at the School Board? Practically none. The Council gets it all. Should the school rate be paid direct to the School Board and the ratepayer noticed that his school taxes were continually increasing, he would begin to take notice and direct his criticisms at the Board instead of at the Council.

Secondly do away with the School Board altogether and let the schools be managed by the Municipal Council, which body has to find the money. I can hear some of you gasp at the temerity of proposing to abolish a time-honored institution like the Board of School Trustees, but, why not? As I said before, the Council of Public Instruction has very wisely retained in its own hands all matters relating to the curriculum and also the appointment of the Inspectors, leaving to the School Board only the building and maintaining of schools, and the hiring and paying of teachers. Can any one say that these functions could not be as well performed by the Council as

by the School Board or that the intelligence of the average alderman or councillor is not at least equal to that of the average Trustee? This method, amongst other advantages, would do away with the over-lapping of overhead charges that, at present, exist. The Council has its own legal advisor, its own medical officer, its own superintendent of buildings, and its own purchasing department, so has the School Board. Why cannot one do for both? There would be a great saving in these items alone without in any way impairing the efficiency. The Council of Public Instruction would still retain the appointment of the Municipal Inspector, but by amplifying his duties he would become an officer much on the lines of a City Engineer, with powers of a manager.

Or thirdly, by adopting the system which I understand prevails in England, where the Council appoints the whole of the School Board, the majority from among its own members and the minority from among those interested in education residing in the Municipality, or perhaps it would be better to have the latter elected by the ratepayers, the Chairman, in any case, to be one of the members of the Council. This would give the necessary leaven of the educational element and retain the financial control in the hands of those who have to find the money.

Some change in the present arrangement is absolutely necessary, especially in view of the strenuous period through which we are passing. Some system should be evolved whereby the body spending the money should shoulder a portion, if not all, of the responsibility of raising the necessary funds, together with the criticism with which taxation is inseparably connected.

The subject bristles with many difficulties, but I cannot help thinking that if both bodies were to approach it in a mutual spirit of give and take, a satisfactory solution of the trouble could be arrived at; one which would give more co-ordination between the two bodies, who after all, are both working to a common end — the public good — and which would, while in no way impairing the high standard of education obtainable in British Columbia, somewhat lessen the cost to the ratepayers.

Moved by Mr. F. F. McDiarmid, Solicitor, seconded by Mayor McBeath that a Committee of five be appointed and that the School Board be requested to appoint five to consult with the Union of British Columbia Municipalities at the earliest convenience.

Carried.

Moved by Mayor McBeath, seconded by Alderman Wright that a vote of thanks be tendered to the two members who read the foregoing papers.

The President: I extend to you both a very hearty vote of thanks.

CHURCHES EXEMPT FROM TAXATION.

Mr. Casey, representing the Church of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary, Vancouver, addressed the meeting at some length:

"There are a number of members at this delegation representative of various denominations, but the question of church exemption from taxation is one in which all the churches are vitally interested. The matter has reached a crisis in the larger cities where many of the churches close in are quite unable to meet the heavy taxes with which they are assessed.

"Under the Municipal Act every place of public worship is exempt from taxation, that is, the actual site on which the church stands, and in the cities or districts where land is of considerable value, it has involved a great hardship on the churches.

"We all fully realize that it is through the medium of the churches that the highest ideals of citizenship are formulated, and we cannot afford to retard the valuable work which they do. The church which I represent, that of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary, is called upon to pay \$2,800 per annum taxes; that of St. Andrews, Presbyterian, adjacent, \$3,000, and these churches find themselves quite unable to cope with these large amounts. The churches are maintained by voluntary subscription and at the present time owing to so many of their numbers being away serving their King and Country, they now find their revenues very largely depleted and are utterly unable to shoulder this onerous taxation.