

# Convention of the Union of Canadian Municipalities

City of Quebec, July 27, 28, 29.

(Continued from Last Month.)

## MORNING SESSION — WEDNESDAY JULY 28th, 1920.

The Convention resumed its deliberations at 10 o'clock, when His Honor Sir Charles Fitzpatrick, Lieutenant-Governor of Quebec paid a visit of welcome to the delegates. After explaining that through a misunderstanding the visit had been delayed a day, His Honor extended a warm welcome to the capital city of the Province of Quebec, which he stated might be considered the heart of Canada, inasmuch as no event of national importance had been uninfluenced by Quebec. He stated that days of racial conflict were over, as it was necessary that the two great races should unite closely to ensure the progress of the Dominion. It was from the old City of Quebec that the discoverers of western communities had embarked. Quebec had kept its old character unspoiled by time and buildings centuries old could still be seen on the narrow streets established in past days.

In conclusion, the Lieutenant-Governor was satisfied to regard the Convention of the Union of Canadian Municipalities as another link ensuring real national unity. He

trusted that the delegates would derive great benefit for their objects, which unquestionably represented sound politics and finally, on behalf of Lady Fitzpatrick and himself extended a cordial invitation to all to pay them a visit at Spencerwood.

Mayor Clarke of Edmonton said he was convinced that apart from benefit resulting for the municipalities, the Convention would certainly have the effect of bringing Canadians closer. He thought it was wonderful to see that with a population of ninety per cent French-speaking, an outside English-speaking Canadian felt just as much at home as in his own town, where the percentage was the reverse. He thought Quebec was giving a splendid example of good feeling and broad-mindedness.

Major Bouchard of St. Hyacinthe, spoke in French, and expressed compliments to the Lieutenant-Governor and to the visitors. He said that while in Victoria, two years ago, a French-Canadian had been elected Chairman of the Convention, though there were only three delegates from this Province.

The Chairman thereupon introduced Mr. F. W. Galbraith, ex-Mayor of Red Deer, Alberta, who addressed the Convention as follows:—

## “COMMISSION GOVERNMENT IN SMALL TOWNS”

It was evidently a Britisher who set the title of my short address this morning—“Commission Government in Small Towns.” Out our way we call them cities, and that is our status under the law, but the Britisher is right—we are only a small community of 2,500 people; yet we have a few things to our credit—one is the installation of a sewerage system fifteen years ago, when the town had 1,500 people. Another is the institution of commission government at the same time.

Our Commissioners are the Mayor, who is elected annually, and the Secretary-Treasurer, Mr. A. T. Stephenson, a South African Veteran, who has been in office for twelve years, and to whom the great success of the system in Red Deer is largely due. The Council has six members, besides the Mayor, three aldermen being elected each year for two-year terms: four members out of a Council complement of seven must seek election or re-election each year, which gives the ratepayers opportunity for an annual accounting, and for any reversal of Council policy. To the Council is left the legislative, the directive, the appropriative functions: to the Commissioners is delegated the executive functions. The Mayor may be said to represent the popular control, the Secretary-Treasurer the expert side of the Commissioners' work. The Commissioners do the Council business formerly handled by Committees of Council—the Council has no regular committees. Special Committees are occasionally appointed for special duty. The Commissioners meet every morning for an hour or more and arrange concerning any work or matters requiring attention, consider the correspondence and accounts, and meet any citizens who wish to interview them on municipal matters. The Mayor is paid \$600. a year—\$1,000 before the war—but he is only expected to attend the Commissioners' meetings and to exercise a general supervision over town affairs. The Chief of Police submits every morning a written report on a printed form of police and health matters, with the meteorological readings. Similarly daily written reports are handed in by the Fire Chief who also handles a work team, and the street foreman who gives the daily work done, men employed, supplies purchased, etc. No material can be got, nor accounts run against the town, without an order from the Commissioners' office. Monthly reports are also submitted by these officers, and by the Medical Health Officer, the Board of Health and the Hospital Board. Over twenty-

four hours before each Council meeting each alderman and each paper is furnished with a Commissioners' report of the business done since the last meeting, with suggestions and recommendations concerning current or new business. The Council meets twice a month and deals with correspondence, approves of accounts for payment, discusses and adopts or amends the Commissioners' report, and gives directions concerning town business. The Commissioners' reports are always published in full in the papers, and the ratepayers, I believe, are thus kept unusually well informed concerning town affairs.

The keynote of the system is the relieving of the Council of executive work by abolishing all committees and vesting their former duties in the Commissioners. It is not as difficult now to get good men to serve on the Council, when they know that the time they are asked to devote to city business is confined to Council meetings. The plan of having daily written reports from the officers, of the Commissioners' daily meeting and of issuing the Commissioners' semi-monthly reports in ample time to allow consideration of them by the aldermen before the council meeting, has conducted to the thorough posting of aldermen, and of the ratepayers too, on town business, and to the harmonious conduct of such business.

Some lines of policy adopted by the Council with the Commission System have been these: Our assessment is made in October, the Court of Revision sits in December, the rate is struck in January and the taxes begin to come in in February. We do not borrow from the Bank until July. We have for six years set aside a reserve fund to meet loss on unpaid taxes; it now amounts to over \$50,000. Our assessment is on the land, with a business tax. There is no tax on improvements.

As to the single tax, or land tax,—I believe that it has been loaded up with the sins of unwise municipal policies for which it was not responsible. Outer land was brought into the municipal area and subdivided for purposes of speculative gain when there was no present nor immediate future need of the lands for residential purposes. Municipal expenditures were made on this basis much beyond the needs of the population. No system of municipal taxation could avert the penalty which followed.

The tax on improvements, as I look at it, means a shifting of taxation and residential property. It may be necessary in some case because of the failure of the owners of vacant lots to pay the taxes, but it should be staved off as long as possible. In Alberta all the rural and village municipalities and most of the town municipalities are under the single tax. In Red Deer the land tax automatically is the basis of assessment, but the Council, by a two-thirds vote each year, can add business and improvement taxes for that year. This is subject to an appeal to the ratepayers, if one-third of the Council want it.