

Our Municipalities and Labour

In a very able paper under the title of "Our Municipalities and Labour," which he delivered before the Union Convention, Mr. F. A. Acland, the Canadian Deputy Minister of Labour, touched one of the new but most serious problems that municipalities have to meet, when he related the fact that in disputes between municipalities and their employees, the Lemieux Act did not apply. That is, the Department of Labour has no authority to appoint arbitration boards, such as those that have been so successful in bringing about settlements in disputes between private capital and labour. This means that unless mutual arrangements can be made by which the Federal Labour Department will be called upon to act, there are no means—there is no Provincial Legislation on the subject—by which settlements can be made in any labour dispute between municipalities and their employees. The consequence is that so far as municipal employees are concerned the only method they have to press their demands—be they good or bad—is by the strike, which, to say the least, is not only crude but senseless, and which often brings about unnecessary suffering to the community affected. On the other hand the only weapon that the affected municipality can use is dismissal, an

equally crude method of procedure. Such an anomaly in our laws is absurd in these days of enlightenment and the sooner something is done to either broaden the Lemieux Act so as to include municipal bodies in its workings or to enact Provincial legislation to meet the case, the better will it be for both sides.

With this idea in view, we presented a resolution to the Convention through Mayor Clarke of Edmonton and Controller Plant of Ottawa to the effect that a committee be appointed, made up of experts to study the subject in all its bearings and report their conclusions to the executive at its winter session, but the Committee on Resolutions turned it down. The reason given being that while the spirit of the resolution was acceptable to the committee, the responsibility of accepting or discovering the conclusions of the experts was too heavy for the executive. Frankly, we were disappointed with the decision, for there is one thing certain—the municipal councils are uninformed regarding their status in the case of serious disputes with their employees, and the sooner they know the better, especially since police and firemen's and other municipal employees' unions are being formed in every city and town.

"Reviewing The Union"

The annual Convention of the Union of Canadian Municipalities just closed marked, we hope, a revival of the old time interest in the national union—an interest that was fast falling to zero. In the early days—that is about eighteen years ago—practically every urban municipality followed very closely the fortunes of the Union, because its leaders were putting up a splendid fight, not only for the rights of municipal government generally, but for pacific local rights against private interests and charter sharks. When these municipal rights became recognized in Ottawa and in the Provincial capitals, the interest would seem to have waned, in spite of the attempts made by the executive to keep it up by taking up other phases of municipal activity. Possibly—we even think probably—the newer phases of municipal government were not taken up vigorously enough to satisfy the new mentality of the municipal councils—there was too much living in the past—with the result that within recent years the conventions have been sparsely attended. Of course, the diminishing interest was attended with a diminishing income.

It was with this knowledge and a genuine desire to break down the apathy that had become associated with an organization of great possibilities that we prepared plans for re-organization of the Union

to meet the new conditions of municipal Canada. These plans were placed last year before the executive for presentation to the annual convention that was held in Kingston in July, 1919, but were turned down as being too radical and the Convention never had an opportunity to discuss them. A previous plan prepared by Commissioner Yorath of Saskatoon and laid before the Victoria convention met the same fate, so that it cannot be said that no attempt had ever been made to place the Union in a position to carry on the splendid work that it had done for the municipal life of the Dominion in the past. As a vindication of the soundness of these plans we may say here that the new Quebec municipal union, which has already proved so wonderfully successful, is based on them, so there is no question of their workability.

It was with such a handicap that May or Harold Fisher, of Ottawa, undertook the presidency in 1918, and it says much for his ability and sagacity that during his year of office just closed he has strengthened the position of the Union throughout the Dominion. What a strong man like Mayor Fisher could and would have done with a re-organized Union is obvious when he did so much with so little. As it is, he has left to his successor a heavy task, but with better means to "carry on."