

CONVENTION OF MUNICIPAL EXECUTIVES— (Continued).

Hon. Walter Mitchell, Acting Minister of Municipal Affairs, saying that he would be represented at the meeting by Mr. Oscar Morin.

The Council of Rimouski, expressed their regret at not being represented, and asked that the matter of the taxes for automobiles, temperance hotels, etc., being taken by the Government, be enquired into, as this course deprived the Councils of much revenue that should belong to them.

Mr. Morin pointed out that this was a matter for the Treasurer's Department, rather than for the Municipal Department.

Mayor Martin, Montreal, asked the Deputy Minister to explain how it was that the Government had taken upon itself to create the new Department of Municipal Affairs, and to appoint a Minister and Deputy Minister for the Department. He would very much like to know how it was that such a very important step had been taken without consultation with the various municipal authorities.

Mr. Morin answered that he was not present to offer any explanation or reasons as to the action of the Government in creating the new Law, but was only present in order to have the opportunity of explaining how the law was intended to work.

Mayor Martin was not wishful he explained, to criticize the Government, but merely desired to call to the Deputy's attention the fact that this should have been submitted to the municipalities. "I do not dispute the need for the law, nor its perfection; it is a law that should have been passed twenty years ago. But the way in which it has been passed gives the impression that we, the Mayors of the different municipalities, do not know enough to carry on our administrative work properly."

The Chairman said that the principal point advanced by Mayor Martin was that he was satisfied with the new law. "One cannot criticize the Government for a law which one approves. If blame can rest anywhere, it rests upon the municipalities which allowed the law to be passed without raising a word about it."

Other delegates said that it would not be fair to attack the Government for a law which had passed through the Legislature in the ordinary way of proceeding.

Mayor Thurber, Longueuil, called the attention of the meeting to the fact that the question of a Municipal Department had been discussed at many Conventions of the Union of Canadian Municipalities, and that resolutions had been passed and sent to the Government asking that a Ministry of Municipal Affairs should be created. Those who had taken part at the Conventions held in Toronto, Montreal, London, and Victoria could confirm this.

The Chairman read to the meeting the following resolution: (Congratulating Government on the establishment of the Department), which was carried by acclamation.

Proposed by Ald. Prieur, Pointe-Aux-Trembles; Seconded by Mayor Thurber, Longueuil:

RESOLVED:—That this meeting of representative municipal executives of the Province of Quebec congratulate the Government of the Province on the thoroughness with which it means to administer local affairs, as indicated in the passing of certain legislation at the last session of the Legislature, and in the establishment of a Department of Municipal Affairs under a responsible Minister;

That the delegates present assure the Government of their hearty sympathy and wish to co-operate in making the Municipal Department a success;

That the deliberations of this meeting are toward that end, and that the suggestions are made in good faith with the hope that in their being carried out the statutes under which the Municipal Department is administered will be perfected;

And that a copy of this resolution be sent to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

DEPARTMENT OF MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS.

The Chairman then called upon the Deputy Minister to explain to the meeting Chapter 20 of the Act.

Mr. Morin: I am requested to explain to you Chapter 20. This Chapter is composed of only two or three articles and has for its object the creation of the Department of Municipal Affairs. It gives you a new friend in the municipal field, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the personnel of the new department. I may give the whole Chapter in the following article, which gives you the role of the new department, the field of action of the new department, and says what are the duties and the powers of

the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Article 25 says: Mayor Martin said that the department had taken over all the powers of administration of the municipalities. He is misinformed when he makes that statement. The department has not taken over a single item of administration. The department does not and cannot interfere in any way, shape or form with the administration and with the power of autonomy which is entrusted to the different municipalities. Gentlemen, those of you who are administrators of municipalities, if you follow the law, if you remain within the bounds of the law, the department of municipal affairs will have no work to do, because so long as you will remain within your powers and do things in the way provided by law, the department has absolutely nothing to say to you, except to congratulate you, but where the department does step in and is expected to take action is when the local administrators ignore the law, overstep or violate the law, through ignorance or even through — well, I will not qualify it. It is in the interest of the taxpayers and the Province, that somebody shall be there to remind these gentlemen that they are ignoring certain dispositions of the law, and to bring them back to their duty. This is the sole object of the creation of the department, and if everybody has the goodwill and the charity which should reside in the hearts of our municipal administrators I think we will get along very well together and our life will be a very happy one. This explains to you in brief Chapter 20. It has to do with the creation of the department, its role being to see that you administer within the law. There are quite a number of cases throughout the different statutes where the words Secretary of the Province have been changed to Minister of Municipal Affairs. In future you should now address to the department of Municipal Affairs everything concerning Municipal affairs, in the place of the Secretary of the Province.

The Deputy Minister then explained Chapter 60 as follows:

"Chapter 60 creates a new chapter in the Revised Statutes of Quebec. I will take the first paragraph (5956i.) The Minister of Municipal Affairs may, and it is his duty, to audit the books of all the municipalities of the Province, even including Montreal if necessary. All the municipalities of the Province fall under this paragraph, and the Minister has the power to send auditors and audit the books. I will pass to paragraph 5956n, which says that if the report of the inspector shows such a condition of affairs in the municipality as warrants summary action, the council shall forthwith, upon receipt of the report, take such action thereon as may protect the interests of the municipality affected, and in default of the council so doing within thirty days from the receipt of the report, any ratepayer may take an action in law to compel the council to adopt the proper remedy.

Mr. E. T. Sampson (Outremont): May I go back to paragraph 5956i, which gives only two months to the municipalities within which to despatch the certified financial statement of the Municipality. That to my mind is too short. Why five months must elapse after the expiration of the fiscal year to allow all items to come in, and then you have to allow for the various other officers of the municipality to pass on their reports as to works and progress and expenditure, and so on, and two months seems entirely too short in which to get the work done.

Mr. Morin: I do not see why, if we succeed in bringing about what is now under study, that is a uniform system of bookkeeping for municipalities of a similar size, if our inspectors can succeed in getting the books kept up to date, which is not done to-day, the authorities think that two months should be sufficient to have a report for the preceding year made up, because we cannot conceive that works can go on for two months after the closing of the year and accounts be paid for two months and yet charged to the preceding year. We believe that works done in 1917, for instance, should be paid for within a shorter time than two months after the close of the year, or they are not works which belong to that year. But, gentlemen, if you really think that two months is too short, and experience goes to show that two months is too short there will surely be some way to have the Act amended. If by next session you find the time too short then make a resolution, but give it a trial for a year or two, because I think in that time we shall have established a modern system, and if the books are kept up to date, you will find that two months is plenty to draw up a statement for the Government.

Mr. H. J. Rose (Chairman of Committee on Uniform Ac-