

Civic Affairs in Manitoba

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Winnipeg would abolish its Board of Control.

The long debated question of the maintenance or abolition of the Winnipeg Board of Control again cropped up at a recent meeting of the City Council and unexpectedly led to a long debate, during which seeds sown in the speeches of various members—more unexpectedly still—took ground, with the result that several meetings have since been held and the whole question of abolishing the Board is likely to be put up to the electors.

While neither the City Council nor the Legislative Committee had any idea as to a substitute for the Board in the government of the city, it has since been decided to ask power from the Manitoba Legislature to submit a referendum to the electors on the question on whether they want the board retained or abolished.

City Solicitor Hunt pointed out at several of the meetings, that when the city proposed to abolish such a body they would have to show the legislature that they proposed to introduce some more satisfactorily considered substitute. No other alternative system, however, has been proposed, but those referred to in the course of the several meetings included the old form of administration by aldermanic committees; the appointment of commissioners who would simply make recommendations to the council and the appointment of a city manager, while several aldermen expressed a preference for the Board of Control as at present if its duties to the Council were more clearly defined.

Controller Cockburn, who has been in the Council for many years and on the Board of Control since its inception, argued that the city years ago had risen up against the old form of government by aldermanic committees which, people would recollect, had been a distinct failure. They should therefore consider very carefully whether the commission form of government could be considered an improvement on the present form.

Such a drastic change in the government of one of the largest and most progressive cities in the Dominion requires more than mention in a journal of this kind, and it might therefore not be out of place to give the wording of the motion which at the meeting of the City Council was carried by 18 to 2. This read as follows:

"Whereas the question of the addition to the membership of the City Council of four controllers and the creation of the Board of Control as part of the civic administration was submitted on June 28, 1906, to the vote of the ratepayers legally qualified to vote for mayor and aldermen under the Winnipeg charter;

"And whereas the question was decided in the affirmative and the Board of Control has now been in existence for ten years;

"And whereas it is deemed proper that the ratepayers should have an opportunity of expressing an opinion as to the continuation of the present system of civic administration.

"Now, therefore, be it resolved, that the legislation and reception committee be instructed to consider and report to Council an amendment to the charter providing for the submission of a referendum on the question of eliminating the offices of the four Controllers from the membership of the Council and abolishing the Board of Control.

"And further, that the question making the term of office of members of the Board of Control of two years' duration, two to be elected each year, shall also be submitted at the same time."

There is thus three schemes of government, any one of which may in the near future be adopted for the administration of the city's business, namely:

1. The Board of Control may remain, and if it does remain the Controllers will in all likelihood be elected for a term of two years. It will continue operating as in the past in an executive and administrative capacity, with a seat on the Council and a vote in the legislation of the city;

2. The City Council may elect committees to take charge of all the departments of work as at the present time, reorganizing the departments and consolidating the work. Instead of remitting duties to the Board of Control, the committees, and especially the chairman of the committees, would be responsible to a much larger extent. The heads of the departments would be called into the committee meetings to confer with the members and would take instructions from the chairman of the committee. Committees would be responsible for expenditures, and would be responsible to the Council. Recommendation for ex-

penditures would come from the committee to the Council and would have to get the sanction of the council.

3. The Council might work with its committees, but in order to relieve the aldermen of much of the executive work, appoint on a salary a couple of commissioners who, in conjunction with the mayor, would be the city commission. This body would make the recommendations and carry out the instructions of the Council without regard to any elective influences. In short, this body would be in the position of managers appointed by a board of directors.

So far, so good. Without doubt, it is desirable that the opinion of the citizens should be finally determined after the trial they have given the Board. Certain cogent criticisms have been directed at the Board, and none of the reforms which are highly desirable in civic administration can be properly proceeded with until it is known whether the Board of Control as an institution is endorsed by the electorate, or whether it should disappear. Therefore, when legislative authority for the abolishment or otherwise is obtained at the forthcoming sessions of the Manitoba Legislature, the question will arise: What will be the situation if the referendum results in the abolition of the Board of Control? First of all the Legislature may require the alternative to be drafted so that the change may come into effect automatically, according to the result of the voting on the two questions. It might also be desirable to take the feeling of the electorate upon the several schemes before the matter could be regarded as finally disposed of. It seems, therefore, only reasonable to expect that something will be done to fill the gap left in the charter should the Board be abolished, as otherwise there would be an interregnum until still further legislation could be obtained.

Civic Salaries.

The settlement of the much discussed civic salary question, which, condensed, means a further fifteen per cent. increase on the 12½ per cent. increase granted early in 1917, and which must be dealt with shortly when the Board of Control draws up its estimates for the coming fiscal year, commencing May 1, is giving the members of the Board a great deal of serious concern, and it is quite likely that they may call in outside assistance to help them come to some definite and satisfactory conclusion. An expert belonging to the Municipal Research Bureau of New York may be asked to come to Winnipeg and study the salary question with a view to drawing up a schedule of wages for all civic employees.

It seems quite possible that a system somewhat similar to that followed by the Federal Government may be adopted, whereby a fixed salary is attached to a certain position with a minimum and maximum for each specified class of work. This would include a regular yearly increase until the higher figure is reached, when an employee can qualify for a higher class to which a better salary is attached. The salary question is certainly one which will have to be settled when the estimates for the coming fiscal year are being drawn up and, together with the proposed pension scheme, which would be effected by the salary question, is one which is just now being given a deal of thought and consideration by civic authorities.

A Civic Liability of \$700,000.

According to the report of the Civic Research League, Winnipeg, has a civic liability of over \$700,000 incurred up to January 1, 1917, in connection with its pensions to civic employees. The report states that instead of proceeding hitherto on any sound basis of setting aside reserves, the city has been granting retiring allowances each year to the men who in that year have become eligible for pensions. At present, the annual outgo for both general civic employees and police force is well on to \$32,000.

For the immediate present this procedure may seem cheap and easy as compared with a new plan suggested under an actuarially prepared scheme by Professor Mackenzie of Toronto University, but means a very "steep grade" for the future and a four-fold climb in the end. In short, the fallacy of the existing scheme is similar to that of the many assessment insurance schemes that have got into difficulties of late years.

The question is one to be met fairly and squarely. At present it is proposed to fund the already accrued liability of approximately \$700,000 and spread its payment over the next 40 years so as to equalize the burden. Then, for the future, it is proposed to build up a fund so that each generation of taxpayers will be making honest provision for the old age of its own servants. It is proposed that half