

The Government of Montreal

During the present session of the Quebec Legislature quite a number of plans were presented to the Private Bills Committee by an equal number of Montreal associations for the better government of the commercial metropolis. These suggested plans ran the whole gamut of would-be reform from the initiative, referendum and recall to the nomination of candidates by self-elective bodies and the election of the council by property owners only. The reason of the agitation for a change in the government of Montreal is that the present system of Mayor, Controllers and Aldermen has not worked satisfactorily inasmuch as there is no co-ordination between the controllers and aldermen, with the consequence that both bodies have become dissatisfied.

The Premier (Sir Lomer Gouin) has now introduced a new plan, which no doubt will be accepted by the legislature if not as a whole, with slight changes, that calls for commission government pure and simple, and an appointed commission at that. The main features of the new scheme are as follows:

- (1) A Council of twenty elected from twenty, wards, with a Mayor who will be elected at large.
- (2) The functions of the Council to be purely legislative.
- (3) The duties of administration to be vested in a Commission of five, composed of the city attorney (chairman); the city comptroller; the city treasurer (who will be permanent members), and two nominees of the Provincial Government who will hold office for four years. The Commissioners will have a seat with the right of voting in the Council.
- (4) The three civic employees on the Commission cannot be dismissed except on a two-thirds vote of the City Council ratified by the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council. Reports made by the Commission to the City Council can only be rejected by a vote of from two-thirds to three-quarters of the Council.
- (5) The Commission will have power to name a technical commission composed of heads of departments, with one or two outside engineers. This will be a purely advisory body.

There is no doubt about the above measure being drastic and reactionary, for it simply makes the nominees of the people—the Mayor and Council—into mere figureheads, but the administration of Montreal has got into such a complicated state that drastic measures are necessary to save it from utter chaos.

It is only fair to state though that the complications have been brought about more by the system than the personnel, a system that was bound to bring about misunderstanding and consequently maladministration. Individually the aldermen are fairly representative of their respective wards, and the controllers who were elected at large, are the nominees in every case of some citizen organization, while the principal officers are among the best in Canada in their different departments. This is recognized in the new plan in which three of them become permanent members of the administration.

So that the indiscriminate condemnation that has been freely passed on the personnel of the the administration is not backed up by the facts. The pity of it is that this same criticism has gone abroad as representative of the concerted opinion of the electors, whereas the electors themselves have been too indifferent to take any interest in the civic affairs of their own city—even at election times.

Frankly the electors have only themselves to blame that the power to administer their own affairs has been for a time taken out of their hands, for had a better civic spirit prevailed such a pass as was witnessed six years ago, when the system of Mayor, Alderman and Committees was changed to the present system, with the hope of a better administration, and is again being witnessed in another change, would have been impossible. An elected body, whether good or bad, is truly representative of those who elect it.

The only hope that we can see for the electors of Montreal in again securing the administration of their civic affairs by popular government is to take a keener and more intelligent interest not only in the new council, even with its curtailed powers, but to educate themselves in civic government as it is practised in other cities. Then, and not till then, will they be able to demand from the Provincial legislature what is after all their just right. At the present moment the great metropolis city of Montreal, which contributes the larger part of the income of the Province, has been told by the Provincial Legislature, that it is not capable of governing itself and consequently must have an administration nominated by the said legislature. Not a position to be proud of, but Montreal deserves it all.

KULTURE OR CIVILIZATION.

At a recent convention of the League of Minnesota Municipalities Mayor Hardie, of Lethbridge, President of the Union of Canadian Municipalities, delivered an address, which under the title of "Which shall it be—Kultur or Civilization," was splendidly illustrative of the spirit of the Canadian West in this war. Mayor Hardie struck the note of patriotism at the outset and applied it with vigor to the responsibility of Canadian and American citizens. The address is repeated on another page in this issue.

COMMISSIONER BRADSHAW.

In selecting Mr. Thomas Bradshaw, Finance Commissioner of Toronto, to advise him in regard to municipal issues, the Minister of Finance has taken a wise step in securing the co-operation of the municipal councils of Canada in his financing of the war. Commissioner Bradshaw, above any other man, has the confidence of the councils and their officials for not only does he know all about the financing of a community but he has time and again given the benefit of his knowledge and experience to councils who have sought his advice, and they know that any decision he may give regarding municipal issues will be fair.