

INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS OF CANADA.

Toronto, November 15, 1907.

Editor, CANADIAN ARCHITECT AND BUILDER.

Dear Sir,—Since my last communication I have examined the "Project of an Act to Incorporate the 'Institute of Architects of Canada,'" and have been struck with the fact that there is not a single reason given, from the standpoint of the people of Canada, why the use of the "title of architect" or the right "to act or practice as architect" should be the special privilege of members of the I.A.C.

While there can be no difference of opinion among architects as to the desirability, from their own point of view, in having the very highest possible standard for entrance to an architectural organization, there at once arises a positive difference of opinion when one group of men wrongly claim that this carries with it the conclusion that any architectural organization, be their proposed standard of membership never so high, should have the powers asked for in the proposed act. It is to the interest both of architecture as a Fine Art and for the general benefit of the people of Canada that they should not have it. And there is nothing contained in the various tests set forth in their act which ought to carry with it any other privilege than the privilege of entering into full membership in an architectural organization.

The fact that the I.A.C. have in their application for incorporation given no reason why a citizen of the Dominion, who has qualified himself to act or practise as an architect, should be prohibited from doing so if he preferred, to belong to an architectural society which in his opinion had higher ideals, and was therefore built on a more solid and permanent architectural foundation than that formulated for the I.A.C., leads one to suppose the leaders of the I.A.C. have come to the conclusion that no adequate reason can be given why they should ask this special and improper legislation.

I can conceive of only two reasons why an architectural organization might think they ought to get this power: The first is they might imagine, though erroneously, that the quality of architecture in the Dominion might be improved by this sort of paternal oversight of the profession, instead of letting Art have her free course as she has had from time immemorial. The second reason might be they may imagine, though quite erroneously, as in the first case, that a set of plans and specifications of some building project might not need to be subjected to examination by a duly authorized and qualified government inspector, municipal or otherwise, before a permit was given for its execution, vainly imagining all that was necessary to guarantee its safe erection being that the originator of the project was accepted by their society as an individual competent to practise architecture.

There is a third reason (advanced during the last week by a member of the council of the O. A. A.), viz., the benefit of the profession.

It is evident on the face of it that none of these reasons are in any degree a sufficient reason why the prayers of the petitioners should be granted. For while it is desirable that all assistance possible should be given to the rising generation of architects by architectural societies, it is not only equally important but more so that no individual architectural society should have entire oversight of the whole of the younger members of the profession any more than in painting the "school" of impressionists and the school of realists should control all artists, or one group of authors should say who would be permitted to express his thoughts in prose or poetry. Such attempts by cliques have never helped the cause of the arts. Furthermore, not all the architectural societies of Canada combined should have the right to interfere with any citizen of the Dominion practising his profession according to the building by-laws of that place in which his client may wish him to carry out some architectural project of his.

The second reason can be strikingly answered by the Quebec bridge incident. If the government had appointed a commission to enquire into the details of its construction and have the oversight of its erection, it is more than likely it would not have been necessary to appoint a commission to enquire into the cause of its destruction.

As to the third reason advocated: It is enough to say the good of architecture ought to be the greatest good for which the profession can labor; and "the good of the profession ought not to be obtained by a sacrifice of the rights of the public, as the public are surely entitled to employ any architect who may show himself to be qualified to carry out an architectural project in accordance with the building laws of the community. It will be evident to all that the best method of deciding whether an architect is qualified to practise as architect is to put him to a continuous test by examining minutely all his projects during the whole of his practice, instead of subjecting him at the beginning of his practice to a preliminary examination on some theoretical problems never intended to be carried out.

I think the I. A. C. when they propose such sweeping propositions affecting the rights and privileges of certain citizens of the Dominion owe it to the people of Canada and the members of the profession to say on what ground they think they should have these special privileges, so that the matter might be thoroughly debated pro and con, instead of attempting to obtain what is really a "snap verdict" on the case; though as a matter of fact I feel sure the only possible chance of such a petition being granted by the government lies in the fact that the true intent, meaning and outcome of the act is, by its wording, most artfully concealed from those who are not thoroughly familiar with the arguments for and against granting such powers to an architectural organization.

Yours truly,

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