

Montreal's New Government System*

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Under its amended charter the city is governed by a mayor, a commission of five members, called "the administrative commission of the city of Montreal," and a council composed of the mayor and one alderman for each ward. The present chief city attorney, the present city comptroller and the city treasurer are ex-officio members of the commission and may be dismissed only by a vote of two-thirds of all the members of the council and such dismissal shall take effect only if approved by the lieutenant-governor in council. The other members of the commission are appointed for four years by the lieutenant-governor who may, however, dismiss them at any time for cause and appoint their successors. The chairman of the commission is designated by the lieutenant-governor, his salary being \$12,000 per year. The other members of the commission receive \$10,000. Three commissioners form a quorum. The chairman or the member presiding in his absence shall vote as commissioner, but shall have no casting-vote.

The following powers are exclusively vested in the commission:

1. The powers which the city charter, the other general or special acts and municipal by-laws of the city conferred, previous to April 2, 1916, either upon the city, or the council, or the board of commissioners, or upon the two latter bodies jointly or subordinately one to the other.

2. The powers which may after April 2, 1918, be conferred (a) upon the commission appointed by a general or special act; (b) upon the city by a general or special act; (c) upon the council by a general act.

The resolutions, by-laws and other acts of the commission shall be submitted to the council in connection with the following matters: annual and supplementary budgets variation of funds; appropriations of the proceeds of loans; taxes and licenses; by-laws, with the exception of these defining the duties of the city officials, officers and employees; granting of franchises and privileges; annexations.

The council may, by a majority of three-fourths of all its members, reject or amend the commission's report of such matters within thirty days of their receipt by the city clerk, or within sixty days in the case of a by-law; otherwise they shall be deemed to be adopted. The council cannot, however, in amending the reports of the commission on questions of finance, increase or apply to other purposes the appropriations recommended, or add new ones. The approval of the municipal electors, whether proprietors of immovable property or others is not dispensed with, when the same is required.

The mayor shall represent the city on all ceremonial occasions; he may submit suggestions to the administrative commission, to the council and to the committees of the council; shall preside at the meetings of the council; shall have the right to vote on all questions submitted to the council.

For many years there has been much fault finding, and a royal commission resulted in what is known as the Cannon report, prepared by Mr. Justice Cannon. This was a scathing indictment of the administration. The city was then governed by aldermen elected one from each ward. The work of the council was divided between a large number of committees, the recommendations of such committees generally being adopted by the council. The charter was then amended and provision made for the election of a board of control in addition to the mayor and council. From the first there was friction between the two bodies and between the members of the board who made the mistake of giving each member a district or department control in practice quite arbitrarily. Matters continued to go from bad to worse; the debt, an abnormally large one, continued to grow and the demand became insistent that a new form of government be inaugurated.

While the charter prior and subsequent to the creation

of the board of control was quite broad the government of the province, which granted the charter, always took the view that it could at any time step in and pass laws directly affecting the city even though the city had apparently been granted such powers. The "home rule for cities" idea had made little if any headway in this province or for that matter in any part of Canada.

For some years delegations have been going, not to the city hall but to Quebec, pleading for amendments to the city charter until it became quite clear to those people that the city was really, in the important matters ruled at Quebec. Strangely enough the Quebec government was not expected (until recently) to take any of the blame for the lack of good city government. The French-Canadian electors seem at last to be very much aroused and recently have been holding public meetings protesting against taking away the power of the alderman and the granting of a new franchise to the tramways company. The thirteen members of the legislature from the District of Montreal are blamed. There are unconfirmed rumors that the Provisional Government now fear a mistake has been made and that there is a probability that within a few years the present commission will give way to a council. During the last session of the legislature far-reaching amendments to the charter were passed which in effect delegate the powers of the legislature to five commissioners appointed by the provincial cabinet.

As in most large cities much has been made of the alleged bad managements of the aldermen and little has been said publicly of the large sums—many millions lost to the city by the grant, in this case, by the legislature, or valuable public utility franchises for practically nothing; the exemption from taxation of much valuable property; the low taxation of property worth millions of dollars and held out of use for speculative purposes.

Montreal has also had, and is having the experience of having the question of valuable franchises gravely affect the city government.

And as usual the city continues to carry on the unproductive utilities which nevertheless give added value to the privately owned utilities.

It is significant that among those most active in pressing for amendments to the charter which would take the power from the aldermen, were representatives of some of our public utility corporations who apparently feared the aldermen would not favor the proposed new tramways franchise.

Some months ago the Provincial Government appointed a small commission with power to compel the city to enter into a new contract with the Montreal Tramways Company for a period of thirty-six years. This commission had the power to appoint valuers who would fix a value for the company's property. The value was placed at \$36,000,000 which valuation was perforce adopted by the city. The agreement was then enacted into law by the provincial legislature. The provincial government next appointed a tramways commission which is to act as the representative of the citizens and see that a proper service is given. The commission whose salaries are paid by the tramways company consist of an ex-judge, a civil engineer and an architect, all men of good standing who have been successful in their professions. Their decisions are appealable to the provincial public utilities commission whose powers are apparently not well defined and who so far have had little effect in the settling of questions usually determined by such commissions.

Notwithstanding the fact that the members of the new administrative commission are nearly all political appointments it is the general opinion that they will give as good government as is possible under such a system, but the all-important fact remains that "good government is not a satisfactory substitute for self-government" and that the electors of Montreal will not be content until they have a charter which will give them control of the affairs at the city hall and a larger measure of home rule than they have ever had.

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