

# THE CANADIAN MUNICIPAL JOURNAL

AND TELEPHONE AND BUILDING NEWS

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## EXEMPTION FROM TAXATION

The question of exempting certain properties from taxation has been brought very much to the front by some cases which have come before the Legislature of Quebec. These have been in connection with the Town of Outremont, which objected to a nunnery overriding building by-laws which are in force in the town, sanctioned by the Legislature; and the Towns of Longueuil and St. Lambert, which asked—and secured—permission to tax church and school property for local improvements, such as street paving and sidewalks.

The question is a very large and important one, as it involves all the large municipalities, and will gradually obtrude itself on the smaller places.

The question of the exemption of property owned by the Federal and Provincial Governments, and which is for the "general good" of the Dominion or Province, and not for the specific good of the place in which it is situated, was ably discussed by Ald. R. V. Harris, of Halifax, N. S., at the U. C. M. Convention in Windsor, Ont., last year, and was reported in full in our issue of October last.

The justice of the Federal or Provincial Governments compensating any place for such property exemption seems unassailable.

But one great part of the question of tax exemption relates to the way in which ecclesiastical and school property is allowed to escape from any contribution towards the expenses of the general up-keep and protection.

Of course this is most marked in Montreal where the exempted property is valued at \$120,119,419, of which \$29,718,608 is municipal, and may therefore be taken entirely out; \$10,852,000 is Federal property; and \$2,128,540 is Provincial; the balance, however, is no less than \$78,419,671, which represents very largely the ecclesiastical and school property which forms such a weight upon the city's progress.

The town of Outremont, adjoining Montreal, is already a sufferer from such exemptions. Some time ago, one of the Councillors explained that a certain sisterhood had bought up a large block of land, a good deal of which had been occupied by market gardeners who were tax payers; as soon as the nunnery was completed, the scholars were taught market gardening; and not only did the town thus lose the taxes it had previously collected from this land, but the scholars of the nunnery entered into competition with other market gardeners, and had an advantage by having no taxes to pay.

Is it any wonder that the Town of Outremont does not open its arms wide to welcome another establishment of non-taxable citizens?

Why should not such non-taxable property be made to pay to the city which has increased its values, at least part of the unearned increment?

St. George's Church, Montreal, is being sold for a tremendous increase in land value over the 35 cents per foot which was paid for the site. Why should not some, at least, of this great increment be paid to the City?

The recent fight before the Legislature was based upon a Bill which the sisters brought forward which asked that certain building by-laws, under which the Town had legally refused them permission to build on a certain site, should be set aside for their personal pleasure. This not only makes a mockery of the admirable custom of having good building by-laws, but raises the question as to how far proprietors who have already had to submit to these by-laws have a right to claim damages. If damages can be claimed, who is to pay them? The town certainly is not to blame; so it must be laid at the door of the Legislature which has been cajoled into the change.

Then comes the question of exemption from taxation for a "school." The "School" which the Sisters propose to run at the expense of the proprietors of Outremont, is really a ladies' college of a very expensive kind; and we understand about seventy-five per cent. of the pupils will not be Canadians, but will come from foreign countries. As the site is worth about two million dollars and the proposed building will probably cost another million, it will mean exempted property of a value of three millions. The result will be that there will be a deficit in the taxes of about \$4,000 a year which **the other proprietors will have to make good.**

Why should such an institution have the power to set aside building by-laws, and then compel the community to pay four thousand dollars a year for their up-keep?

The question is not one of race or religion in Outremont, for the Bill was opposed by the Council unanimously, while several leading French speaking lawyers and others formed a delegation to aid the Council in its opposition at Quebec.

In the "good old days," when Church and School property was small, and civic expenses light, such a condition might be excused. But today such action is utterly out-of-date to the city which has met all the expenses which have gone in making the property so much more valuable?

Why should not the adherents of any religious body be prepared to "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's," as was taught by the Great Head of all Christian churches?

Why should the churches benefit at the expense of the workingman, and the slum-dweller?

This plea is not advanced because of a desire to hamper the splendid work that is being done by the churches. On the contrary, the proper payment of their share of taxation would take away one reproach which is logically hurled against ecclesiastical bodies by non-church-goers.

Is it fair for any Christian Church to compel outsiders to pay toward the expenses of the Church?

By the present system, every citizen is taxed to keep up the churches in his city, whether he wishes to do so, or not. This is certainly "taxation without representation."

The Legislature of Quebec has done justly in permitting Longueuil and St. Lambert to compel taxation for local improvements on all who benefit by it.