

Municipal Affairs in Alberta

S. B.

The main feature of municipal affairs since my last letter has been the adjustment of matters after the general municipal elections held in the month of December. While there were a number of changes in municipal heads in many of our Municipal elections, probably the most complete change was that which took place in the Capital City. There, an entirely new man in municipal politics was elected to the position of Mayor, and the whole slate of six Municipal Aldermen who were nominated to support him in the Council were returned to office by large majorities. The Mayor's majority was so large that it is worthy of note. The total votes cast for the Mayor's ticket was something over 10,000. Of these over 8,000 were in favor of the successful candidate. As the defeated candidates were evidently supporters of the old administration, the result would indicate that the ratepayers were very much in favor of a change. The election was hard fought, and the big vote polled showed that the public had been roused to taking a great deal of interest, and if this interest can be kept up the result will have a good effect on municipal work; the success in carrying on municipal business varying in accordance with the interest taken by the public. With an interested and wide awake public, there is little to fear in connection with the proper handling of municipal undertakings.

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In other parts of the Province while the changes in the administration were not so pronounced, many elections were hotly contested, and there will be new faces at many Municipal Boards. In the City of Calgary, the Mayor of last year did not seek re-election, and there were three candidates for Chief Magistrate's chair. One of the aldermen for the previous year, who for some time had been Acting-Mayor, was the successful candidate. In the same city there was a strenuous struggle for the position of Commissioner of Public Works; the former Commissioner going down to defeat largely on the question of a higher rate of taxation, which his opponents claimed he was in some way responsible for, but he leaves office with the reputation of having filled the position of Commissioner of Public Works in a very satisfactory manner. In the cities of Medicine Hat and Wetaskiwin, municipal affairs were very well discussed and with the interest taken the result should be beneficial.

In most of the municipal campaigns the question of financing was the principal question dealt with. Of course, it is only natural that this should be the case, as with good times municipal expenditures were rather heavy in the same way as many individuals took on more liabilities than they could carry; the result being a general tie-

up of practically all municipal undertakings and the necessity of retrenching so as to meet outstanding indebtedness and prepare for carrying on of the business of the Municipality with the least possible expenditure.

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One of the questions occupying the attention of our different municipal bodies at the present time is that of caring for mechanics and laborers who are out of work on account of financial depression. The larger cities in the Province are being helped in this work by liberal grants from the Provincial Government, and some of the municipalities are arranging for the carrying on of certain work throughout the winter for the purpose of giving relief by making provision so that those in need may have an opportunity of earning sufficient money to support themselves through the winter season.

As indicated by the discussions previous to the holding of municipal elections the results are that the policy of the different Municipal Councils for the current year will be one of retrenchment in almost every way possible, and great care will no doubt be taken to go very carefully into matters before any great expenditure is authorized. One of the signs of the times has been the doing away with anything in the shape of a Publicity Department in our cities. This would appear to be a move which should be highly recommended as even under the best circumstances the spending of money for publicity purposes by our different municipalities was a very doubtful investment.

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It would also appear that the investment of the ratepayers' money in such speculative ventures as gas wells is not likely to be much in evidence for some time to come. This is also a move in the right direction, and it is to be hoped that it continues so that we will in future have to see very little of the investment of the revenue of municipalities in undertakings which are not considered safe even by private investors of a venturesome disposition.

On the whole, the municipal outlook for the year 1915 is encouraging. I make this statement from the viewpoint that the affairs of our municipalities will be handled by careful and conscientious bodies of men, and that with the necessary retrenchment and caution in expenditure that will have to be followed, our municipal finances will be placed, if I may say so, on a rather more solid basis than they have been in the past, so that while some of our municipalities are going to find it rather difficult to meet all their obligations for the time being, the result of this financial depression will, on the whole, be in the very best interests of municipal business.

MAYOR JOSEPH ALLEN, OF VERDUN.

Mayor Allen, after serving twenty-six years on the council, the last seven years a Mayor, is retiring from public office. His many friends will wish him a long life in his well earned retirement, for he has served the citizens of Verdun faithfully and has seen it grow from villagehood to citydom, from a few hundreds to a population of 26,000.

PRESENTATION TO DEPUTY MINISTER BAYNE OF SASKATCHEWAN.

As a wedding present the executive of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities presented last month, Mr. J. N. Bayne, Deputy Minister for Municipal Affairs, with an oak cabinet of silver, three storeys high, and containing one hundred and fifty separate pieces. Accompanying the present was an illuminated address, the contents of which must do much to encourage Mr. Bayne in his splendid municipal work for the province. This is not the first present that Mr. Bayne has received from municipal friends, for on his return from his honeymoon a number of his colleagues presented him with a splendid mark of their appreciation. The Journal knows that it is expressing the thoughts of every reader in wishing Mr. Bayne "bon voyage" in his new partnership.

LIBRARY TO OPEN SUNDAY AFTERNOONS.

It has just been decided that during the months of January, February and March, the public library of Saskatoon will be opened for adults only each Sunday from two to four p.m. This is a new departure which, it is anticipated, will be greatly appreciated.

GOVERNMENT SUPERVISION OF MUNICIPAL LOANS.

The Canadian Journal of Commerce, Montreal, in commenting on an editorial which appeared in the December Number of this Journal, suggesting that a Bureau of Municipal Bond information should be formed, says:—

"The present financial stringency caused first by the world wide depression, and further augmented by the war, is likely to teach municipalities a greatly needed lesson. For some time the Journal of Commerce has urged upon municipalities, especially the smaller ones, the need of government supervision. We have frequently pointed out that a small municipality, with its affairs looked after by well meaning, but inexperienced, men, unfamiliar for the most part with conditions of the money market, and the placing of loans, are seldom able to secure the best prices for their securities, nor are they able to float them at the most opportune time. This could largely be obviated by a system of provincial supervision under which a municipality about to make a loan would consult with the provincial authorities, who would advise them in regard to the amount required, how it should be spent, when the loan could best be secured, and in a measure act in an advisory capacity.

There are many advantages to be derived from such a policy. In the first place a better and more uniform price would be obtained, owing to the fact that there would be in a measure a provincial guarantee back of the proposed loan, and also to the fact that such a guarantee would inspire confidence in the banks and others taking up the securities. Altogether, there is every reason for the adoption of some such system, and no reason why the present hit-and-miss method of a small city or an obscure town floating a loan whenever and wherever it could.