

Interfering With Municipal Rights

The Ontario Legislature in its recent legislation concerning the control of the natural gas of the province has taken a position that is in direct contravention to the spirit of British government, which above all things recognizes the sacredness of private property and the rights of the community to control purely local affairs.

Our contemporary, the Ontario "Municipal World," in a recent issue states the case very clearly, as follows:—

The Act of the Legislature concerning natural gas passed at the last session of the House, is the most drastic piece of legislation that has yet come to our attention.

Under it, the Minister of Mines and the Drainage Referee have power to vary the terms of any agreement made or franchise granted with reference to natural gas and gives the Referee power to fix the rates which shall be paid for gas, notwithstanding any agreement that may have been made to furnish gas at any fixed price by the company. It also enables the Minister to cut off the supply of gas to any customers or to any locality.

Under it, any person boring or prospecting for natural gas must first obtain a license from the Government, even if he is operating on his own land for his own use. Power is also given to authorize any person to enter upon any private or public property and operate natural gas works, and to take and use any private property for that purpose.

In short, it enables the abrogation of all contracts entered into with reference to natural gas by any person, corporation,

or municipality, and authorizes the confiscation of private property to be taken or used for natural gas purposes.

The question is what are the Ontario municipalities going to do under the circumstances. According to our contemporary the Ontario Legislature has assumed a prerogative that was never intended in the British North American Act, in placing in the hands of a public servant a power to override all local authority or rights, irrespective of any previous arrangements made in the interest of any community. In other words the Provincial Government, through the Minister of Mines and the Drainage Referee, can not only at any time break any agreement a municipality has made for the supply of natural gas, but can authorize a private individual or company to actually take the place of the municipal authorities for the supply of the gas. This is surely an usurpation of authority, which cannot be resented too quickly by the municipal councils of Ontario.

Undoubtedly the provincial authorities have certain rights, including the general supervision of the municipalities and their administration, but no provincial authority has any moral right to enact legislation—such as the Ontario Natural Gas Act—that will interfere with the good government of any municipality. Whether the Act was drafted to intentionally slight the municipal authorities we do not know but under any circumstances a strong protest should be made by every municipal council in the province.

THE OTTAWA CONVENTION.

Though the programme is not yet complete there is every evidence that the Ottawa Convention of the Union of Canadian Municipalities to be held in July will be one of the most attractive in the Union's history. Outside the official programme Mayor Plant and his colleagues on the Council are determined that the delegates will feel that the City of Ottawa is the one place worth while for a visit. Of course, Ottawa is one of the most beautiful cities on this continent, but what an added pleasure it is to be personally conducted to the many places of interest that abound throughout the city, when one is made to feel at home at a little luncheon or is given an opportunity of listening to Canada's best speakers at a banquet. It is a delightful break in the monotony of official routine, and this the Ottawa municipal authorities know, hence their going out of their way to make the convention a success in-so far as entertaining the guests.

HOUSING FINANCE IN ENGLAND.

Up to the end of March of this year the municipal authorities of England had raised £59,995,657 (approximately \$299,978,285) towards assisted housing schemes. This huge sum is hardly conceivable in Canada but such is the need for dwellings in the Old Country and the determination of the municipal authorities to supply that need, that even this sum does not fully represent what will be raised and spent in housing before the completion of the scheme.

COMMISSIONER R. A. ROSS, D.Sc.

Municipal men throughout Canada will join the journal in congratulating Commissioner R. A. Ross, of Montreal, who recently had the degree of Doctor of Science conferred upon him by the University of Toronto. Mr. Ross for four years has been serving as one of the five commissioners of the City of Montreal, during which period he has given excellent service in a very trying position, inasmuch as the administration commission of Montreal was appointed by the Provincial Government, to straighten out a situation that had become almost chaotic by reason of the rapidly changing systems of government during the previous six years. Undoubtedly the commission has done much good work in the straightening out of Montreal's affairs and when it goes out of existence in October the members will have the pleasure of feeling that their efforts have been appreciated by the citizens, and none more so than Commissioner Ross.

PRINCE ELECTED PRESIDENT OF GOOD ROADS ASSOCIATION OF GREAT BRITAIN.

Prince Arthur of Connaught, K.G., G.C.V.O., was unanimously re-elected president of the Roads Improvement Association (Incorporated) for the ensuing year at their annual general meeting at the Surveyors' Institution.