

First Conference of Civic Improvement League of Canada

On January 20 the first Conference of the Civic Improvement League of Canada was held under most auspicious circumstances, when about 180 delegates met in the large Railway Committee Room of the House of Commons. His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught displayed his deep interest in the promotion of better civic conditions in Canada by being present to open the conference.

Sir John Willison Was in the Chair.

Mayor Porter, of Ottawa, in welcoming the members said that no man could be as good a citizen if he neglected the affairs of his city. He believed the time had come, when the form of municipal government should undergo a change. The present system was unwieldy. The business of the city, he thought, could be more efficiently and more economically governed by a commission. At the same time much could be done to improve the present system. Wise and efficient administration was needed, especially at the present time. Commission government, however, would ensure continuity of policy. They were building for the future and he would be glad to do anything to further the interests of the league.

Dominion Council.

The following resolution was then put to the meeting: "That the names of 66 members of the provisional committee be elected as the first members of the Dominion Council (pro tem.), but that they be requested to take early steps to constitute themselves on a more representative basis."

The representatives by provinces are: Ontario, Sir John Willison, G. Frank Beer, Dr. H. L. Brittain, N. Cauchon, E. P. Coleman, John Firstbrook, J. L. Garland, J. P. Hynes, Dr. Helen McMurchy, W. A. McLean, Geo. Phelps, W. J. A. Donald, Dr. Adam Shortt, Mayor Walters, R. B. Whyte, R. O. Wynne Roberts, Dr. A. S. Rudell, Dr. F. Johnson, Jr., J. J. MacKay.

Quebec: Frank Pauze, Dr. W. H. Atherton, G. F. Benson, H. Bragg, W. H. Dandurand, Dr. E. M. Desaulniers, J. W. Emard, J. J. Fitzgerald, C. H. Gould, J. J. Guerin, Hon. Sydney Fisher, Dr. Frank Adams, S. Warwick, Fred-Alberta: Commissioner Garden, of Calgary.

Manitoba: W. Sanford Evans.

Saskatchewan: Prof. River.

Alberta: Commissioner Gardner.

National: Mr. James White, Dr. J. W. Robertson, Sir Clifford Sifton (Conservation Commission), Dr. P. H. Bryce, Frank Darling, Dr. Deville, C. A. Magrath, Mrs. A. Shortt, Mrs. Smillie, Bryce M. Stewart, J. S. Woods-worth, J. C. Watters, Mrs. Torrington, Prof. Macoun, Douglas Nelles, Thomas Adams.

Sir Jno. Willison, Chairman.

Dr. P. H. Bryce, Ottawa, introduced a resolution, which was passed unanimously, that Sir John Willison be first chairman of the Dominion council of the league.

A vote of condolence to the relatives of the late Dr. Morley Wickett, Toronto, was also passed.

Objects of the League.

Mr. Thomas Adams, Conservation Commission town planning adviser, was called upon to outline the scope of the League. He said that as an organization the Civic Improvement League would have to justify its existence, not by the excellence of its aims but by its success in securing their attainment. He reminded them that in four of the provinces represented an average of over one hundred entirely new towns were created between 1901 and 1911, showing how great the opportunities were in starting the league, while yet there is time to assist in laying the foundation for healthy civic structure throughout Canada.

Department of Municipal Affairs.

Regarding municipal government and finance and unemployment, Mr. Adams said that the greatest need with these matters is that a department of municipal affairs or a local government board should be created in each province.

"The need arises from the fact that we require more uniformity in regard to measures which are necessary to secure, (1) real and effective economies in the conduct of municipal business, (2) lower rates of interest on municipal borrowing, (3) greater efficiency in carrying out public undertakings, (4) proper auditing of municipal accounts, (5) prevention of fire and a consequent reduction in the cost of fire insurance, (6) proper control of labor difficulties during periods of slackness in employ-

ment, with the least harmful results to the citizens affected during such periods, (7) enforcement of sanitary provisions, (8) avoidance of recurring mistakes in administration due to isolated local action, (9) reduction in cost of local improvement without lowering of standards of construction, (10) unifying the methods of valuing land for assessment, and other matters."

Mr. Adams urged the importance of the question of fixing the values of land for purposes of assessment. They should also ask for a census department of the government to obtain municipal statistics.

(A full report of Mr. Adam's Address will appear in March issue.)

The Duke of Connaught.

H. R. H. the Governor-General arrived at 11 o'clock to formally open the convention.

The Chairman in introducing the Royal visitor said that H. R. H. had always been identified with municipal affairs. It was fortunate, that through these critical times they should have the advantage of the presence and counsel of one so closely related to the throne and to the Empire.

His Royal Highness, in replying, said in part, "That in these stirring times, when probably the only occasions on which he spoke were to promote the warlike energies of the Canadian race or to encourage the patriotism and generosity of the men and women of Canada, it was a pleasure to attend the conference of the Civic Improvement League to deal with questions free from the anxiety of war, but deeply connected with the social life and improvement of the vast Dominion. It had struck him that those in Canada were not sufficiently energetic or sufficiently interested in that very important question called town planning. Town planning was a very general term, but to his mind it meant everything connected with our cities, towns and country. It is connected with health, convenience and sanitation, and also with beauty.

It was of great importance for the future advantage of cities of Canada to recognize that whatever they did in the future should be done with an object in view and on fixed principles. There was, he believed, a rising feeling among the present generation to make good this weak point in Canadian administration. He spoke of the health, comfort and convenience, combined with common sense, which existed in the garden cities of England, and urged Canadians to visit them when over there.

Dr. Jas. W. Robertson, referred to the work of the Conservation Commission. In speaking of its aims he said that above all things it was out to abolish poverty. In speaking of the need of educating the public, Dr. Robertson said that it was only possible by experience and not by merely furnishing information.

Sir John Willison, as the Chairman, emphasized the importance of happy surroundings for people to live in. Environment had a lot to do with the character of the people. The league, he hoped, would stimulate public opinion in civic problems. The heart and soul of the meeting was Mr. Adams.

Municipal Finance.

Mayor Walters of Hamilton gave an address on Municipal Finance. He thought that one of the things most needed was a better system of accounting. The problem of purchasing supplies would be improved by a change of ideas and some way of co-operation and exchange of information. Recently they found that Hamilton was buying civic supplies at a lower price and in smaller quantities than Toronto. Regarding the disposal of city debentures, he believed there should be a more uniform method of marketing debentures.

Many Examples Here.

Mrs. Adam Shortt, National Council of Women, said that domestic housekeeping could not be divorced from civic housekeeping. She advocated a number of reforms of which she offered concrete examples from Ottawa. The difference between men in civic life was the difference between the man who said, "What can I do for the city?" and the man who said, "What can the city do for me?" The need of factory inspectors in Ottawa was urged. The question had been hung up between Ottawa and Toronto. The garbage system of Ottawa was next dealt with. The contract was beautiful, she said, but the contract was never fulfilled. The health authorities permitted a most objectionable dump in an undesirable part of the city.