

THE CANADIAN MUNICIPAL JOURNAL

AND REVIEW OF CIVIC IMPROVEMENT

HARRY BRAGG, EDITOR

The National Municipal League

After having attended one meeting of the National Municipal League some time ago in Philadelphia, and following its work every year through its literature, it was pleasant to find it possible to attend this year's meetings in Toronto, and these were unique, since for the first time in its history the League met in Canada, and for the first time held its meetings in a City Hall.

The significance of those two statements seems to be that in Canada the study of Municipal questions and new problems is not ostracized by the city officials and relegated to University professors and other students of municipal questions from outside the arena; but that on this side of the line at least the critics of civic institutions are welcome in the home of these institutions. Indeed so warm was the welcome of the city, that the evening reception arranged to take place in the Archeological Museum of the University was expropriated by the Council and annexed to the City Hall.

This is rather remarkable, as the subjects were discussed rather from the academic point of view of students than from that of men who spoke from the experience of having worked under conditions that needed improvement.

The papers were few, and were read by those who were keenly—even desperately—in earnest about these chosen subjects. Thus the audience in each case got an urgent appeal to study what the speaker claimed was the most important subject before the house.

One very evident condition existed, and that was the absolute lack of knowledge of Canadian Municipal conditions in the minds of most of the visitors, and this in spite of Mr. Woodruff's claim that all the questions were common to both countries. This led to some of the allusions being wasted on most of the Canadians present, who were equally ignorant of the confused municipal conditions across the line. For instance, all references to "primaries" and "party ballots" were lost on the Canadians, except the very few who knew the system in the United States.

Confirmation of this came to us in being asked to give one of the visiting Professors some information about Canadian Municipal elections, when he was amazed to find out that he knew nothing of the simplicity of our system, and admitted that the drastic improvements advocated by some of the speakers did not bear any interest to Canada, because we did not need them here. On the following day, in a casual conversation he said to one of the group that he had entirely changed his point of view since the talk with us on the previous evening.

President Foulke smilingly admitted that since he had come to Toronto and examined the ballots used at the municipal elections, he had learned what he had never known before, namely, the simplicity that existed in Canada with regard to municipal elections.

The Report on Commission Government of Cities was largely lost on Canadian municipalities, because local conditions do not need such a drastic and dangerous change in the form of Government. As one Professor admitted to us, Commission Government was a desperate remedy for a desperate condition, and might prove as bad as the original conditions, if the vigilance of the citizens relaxed. It was interesting, too, to find that the Committee had moved from its earlier position of seeing perfection in Commission Government to the more advanced move of a City Manager.

The "Canadian Session (or more properly the Ontario Session, for no one outside of that Province appeared on the programme)", presented surprises to the visitors in every paper. The solution of the Power problem by the Hydro-Electric Commission; the directness and broadness of the Municipal Act; the solution of the Housing problem; and the Public Ownership example in Toronto's Harbour; all opened the eyes of the visitors to the practical work done in Canada in problems which they admitted they were studying academically across the line. As the Chairman pleasantly admitted, we in Canada had been doing while they had been talking.

Many of the subjects on the programme were, naturally, of equal interest to those on both sides of the line, and it was very pleasant to meet with those who are grappling with civic problems, some of which are common to both—and to find some desire to know a little about conditions and laws which obtain in Canada, and this pleasant intercourse between those of two different nations, as was expressed many times, tends towards that harmony which should exist, based upon a common ancestry, common traditions and common ideals and aims for human welfare.