

The Township Council System.

In the township system we have had experience with that form of government in which the people are the only source of power, and municipal independence is therefore a natural consequence.

Statistics show that in 1881 the average rate of taxation, per head of municipal population assessed, was \$3.26 in townships, and that this amount gradually increased to \$4.17 in 1892, or an advance of nearly 25 per cent. in ten years. During the same period the taxation in towns and villages increased 83 per cent., and in cities 122 per cent. The average for all municipalities being \$6.18 per head, or an increase of 46 per cent. A gradual increase of the rate of taxation in townships without any corresponding benefit is sufficient to warrant the statement that township affairs are not managed with the economy necessary to inspire the people with confidence in the system.

The expense of municipal government in townships amounts to \$275,000 annually. This is not a large amount when divided among the various townships and the officials they are required to employ.

The expenditure for roads and bridges in townships varies from \$600,000 to \$800,000 annually, and to this expenditure must be added the amount of statute labor performed, which is equal to \$950,000, making a total of \$1,750,000. This is the only fund dispersed in its entirety, by the municipal council and owing to the necessity for keeping roads and bridges in a constant state of repair to prevent actions for damages, they are unable to economize on this item, as much as they might desire to do.

The present system of electing township councillors, together with the ward system in operation, in many townships, is the cause of municipal extravagance or mismanagement.

The great bane of municipal government is the ward system. There is no inducement to the ward member to interest himself in the general affairs of his municipality. The idea of a council elected irrespective of ward divisions is the correct one, it enlarges the constituency of a councillor and calls for a wider application of his influence. The aim should be to adapt the public expenditures and improvements without consideration of ward boundaries.

It may be said that the system of electing members of the township council by wards is not in itself objectionable, but when the council endeavors to proportion the annual expenditure equally between each ward irrespective of other considerations, a serious fault leading to extravagance is the result.

The township is a small enough unit for local government. It is impossible to find a township the four wards of which

require the same amount of money each year. Then again there is a great difference of opinion as to how much money should be expended. Some are inclined to be economical and others the opposite, and the result is that each member tries to get the lion's share. A councillor who by manipulation succeeds in securing this is sure of re-election. The ward is his first, last and only consideration. On the other hand in a council elected by the whole municipality the members are not interested in any particular section, but each receives what its actual requirements demand.

If the ward system is to be continued, the road expenditure of the whole township not including the cost of bridges should be raised annually, in the wards in which the money is expended.

Under the present system of election, township councillors, do not have an opportunity to display their ability to carry on municipal work in an economical manner. This could be easily remedied by extending the term of office of township councillors. School trustees are kept in office three years, one being elected each year, the result being that experienced men always form the majority. In the townships, if the reeve and one councillor were elected each year, the councillors retiring in rotation, experienced men would always be found at the council board. Municipal office would then be accepted by many who object to the annual election. Road and bridge improvement, which now costs one-third of all taxes collected, would be carried on in a uniform manner. A new member with ideas would have men of experience to advise him, and an economical management of every department of the municipal service would be the result.

It will be admitted by all, that the reasons advanced for a change in the township council system, are applicable to the county council, the business of which should be transacted by experienced members. It is rather misleading to say that the business of county council is to be judged by the amount of the controllable expenditure. It is their duty to keep the uncontrollable expenditure within reasonable limits. In many cases, the greater portion of the county rate is for works and other debts contracted by former county councils, and it is to prevent a repetition of these expenditures that experience is necessary. In addition many questions not of a financial nature are brought before county councillors for discussion.

Underneath all the remedies that may be suggested for the better government of any municipality is the doctrine that all their affairs must be conducted on sound business principles. The first is to place these affairs in the hands of an experienced board of management. The second is to secure an efficient supervision

or audit of financial transactions. It has been shown how in townships these experienced members may be secured. For many years the complaint has been that municipal audits are inefficient. The numerous defalcations of municipal treasurers and collectors reported from time to time show this, and in addition the report of the bureau of industries shows that a uniform system, on which to keep municipal accounts, to be actually necessary. To secure this, the appointment in each county of an auditor is recommended. The duties the auditor would perform may be briefly outlined as follows: 1st, to be ex-officio auditor of the accounts of the county treasurer and of every local municipality in the county, to act with an auditor to be appointed by the council in the yearly audit of the treasurer's books and also as a member of the administration of justice audit; 2nd, it should be his duty twice each year to check over each treasurer's cash account and verify balance; 3rd, to furnish the bureau of industries, as required, with statements of the finances of his county and local municipalities therein; 4th, to make recommendations to the council from time to time of anything he deems advisable to bringing before them and in a general way, to have the entire supervision of the financial transactions of the municipalities. Many would say that there is an objection to the appointment of an additional official on account of the expense, but when we consider that one-half of the cost of our present audit system and in the counties that a proportion of of the administration of justice audit expenses would go towards his salary, any objection on this account is uncalled for. The fact of having the financial transactions of municipalities conducted in a business way, would be true municipal economy. An efficient man would be required to fill this office. The auditor should be independent of the council, and his duties should be regulated by statute. He should be appointed by the county council, and when once appointed, a 2-3 majority of the whole council should be required to dismiss him.

In quite a number of municipalities throughout the province, the recent municipal elections were keenly contested, and several of our exchanges are discussing the propriety of a compulsory voting act and prohibition of canvassing. Smiff, in the *Bobcaygeon Independent*, also favors making it a fineable offence for a voter to confidentially inform a candidate that he had "given him a lift," he then relates a bit of personal experience, as follows:—"A great many years ago, Smiff was a candidate for some public office, and forty-seven different voters distinctly assured him they had given him a lift. When the poll was counted, Smiff had two votes, and one of these was his own."