

COMMUNICATIONS

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ACCIDENTS ON HIGHWAYS

To the Editor of The Municipal World:

SIR,—Kindly allow me space in your valuable paper to discuss for a little, a question that is attracting the attention of the yeomanry of the Province from time to time, namely the law respecting accidents upon the highway.

The Province of Ontario is the only Province in the Dominion subject to such legislation making each municipality responsible for all accidents upon the highways.

I am safe in saying that more of the people's money has been, and is now being, spent upon the building and maintenance of good roads in Ontario than in all the other Provinces put together, and that we have better roads on the whole than any of the other Provinces.

Yet there is not one mile of road in the Province but where an accident is liable to take place and the municipality be put to an enormous expense, as the law now stands.

It is universally claimed—and rightly so—that this is unfair and unjust in nearly every instance, as in nearly every instance where an accident takes place, it is the result of the lack of reasonable precaution, or recklessness on the part of the victims themselves, and the result is the township is sued for damages, and thus enormous sums of the people's money are spent, which should be used in keeping the roads in order.

This year alone the township of Westminster will pay for an accident of a trifling nature the sum of \$4,200, a tax of \$7 per hundred acres in the township. Yarmouth, also, is put to the cost of some two thousand dollars in a case which, if properly looked into, should have been settled for one-quarter of the amount paid.

The trouble is, when an accident takes place, from whatever cause, or however trivial, the victim knows that he or she can recover damages, and they look upon the municipality as rich and able to pay smartly, so that a reasonable settlement cannot be made with them by the officers of the township, and the result is a lawsuit.

The worst and most aggravating feature of the whole business is, that in many cases, those who meet with accidents of this kind, resort to dishonest means in order to obtain heavy damages. They fain all sorts of bodily injuries and ailments, fool and deceive their medical attendants with every scheme and device at all possible, until they obtain a verdict for damages, and then, as if by magic, they are as well as ever in a day or two.

About two years ago the municipal officers of the county of Elgin made an effort to have the law respecting accidents upon highways changed and modified, so as to in a measure, at least, relieve the Province of so heavy a burden as it is now carrying in this respect, but failed in their efforts. It is well, however, to persist in a good cause, and now as the municipal elections will soon be on, would it not be a good idea to bring this matter before the electors, and have it well discussed, with the view of once more calling the attention of the Legislature to its modification and adjustment. I am of the opinion that nine-tenths of the people of Ontario would gladly vote to have a radical change in this respect.

Thanking you, Mr. Editor, for trespassing thus far on your valuable space,

J. CAMPBELL.

Belmont, Ont., Nov. 20, 1907.

EXTREME VIEWS OF PUBLIC OWNERSHIP

A paper on public ownership, read before the recent meeting of the Union of Canadian Municipalities, contains the following unique sentences:

"Private ownership of utilities is largely, if not entirely, responsible for the existing corruption in public life; public ownership would tend to the purification of politics and the elimination of graft."

Everyone interested in the purity of public life must necessarily be made to pause by such a statement. If it be true, then we should advocate public ownership. This may be advisable even if we are not theoretically certain as to the wisdom of preferring public operation to private operation. The decision rests upon the truth of the statement made by the representative of the Public Ownership League, who read the paper.

The greatest talk about graft is coming just now from the Ottawa Opposition. And whence their charges? Do they not wholly concern the administration of public property along public ownership lines? They involve the public ownership of the Intercolonial Railway, the marine fleet, and the crown domain. Has any person arisen to say that any part of the corruption and graft—if there are any—is due to any other cause than bad administration of public trusts? Very little, if any, is charged to private corporations—nothing more than a vague insinuation that, like private individuals, they sometimes contribute to campaign funds. When we investigate further and inquire into municipal administration, are there any cases where it has been proved that any corporation or private owner of a public utility has corrupted a city? Is there any evidence, for example, that any street railway corporation in any city in Canada attempts to control the city council?

The truth is that the question between public and private ownership has little to do with corruption or graft, which is a question of men and morals, rather than of systems. There is little corruption or graft in Canada because public opinion holds most men to correct principles; there is more in the United States because public opinion does not prescribe so high a standard, especially in the state and municipal government. Such a statement as that sent out by the P. O. League and quoted above is a libel on the country, and at the same time wonderfully absurd.

Public ownership, without public operation, has done fairly well in Canada. For example, the Montreal Street Railway Co. during the year ending September 30th, 1907, has paid percentages to the city amounting to \$214,840. The Toronto Street Railway will pay the municipality nearly double that amount this year. On the other hand, public ownership, with public operation, has worked badly sometimes, as in the case of the Intercolonial; it has worked fairly well in other cases, for example, the successful operation of the waterworks system in Toronto and other cities.

Public ownership and operation in some United States cities has worked ill, resulting in corruption, graft and inadequate service. For example, previous to 1897, Philadelphia had a municipal gas plant which was run at a loss, and which bred the "gas ring." In that year it was turned over to a company, which has since improved the quality of the gas, and gives percentages, street lighting and other benefits to the city estimated to be worth about two million dollars annually. This is a case where private ownership lessened corruption, abolished graft, and gave improved service and better financial results.

The evidence varies from city to city, from country to country, but it is quite evident that neither public ownership nor private ownership is responsible for corruption and graft. According to the power and force of public opinion corruption is present or absent.—*Canadian Courier.*