

Civic Affairs in Manitoba

H. E. MORTON.

Winnipeg's civic debt has been reduced by no less than \$4,782,845.73 since April 30, 1915. This was the outstanding feature of the annual report of the sinking fund trustees presented to the city council recently.

The total monies available for investment during the year 1917, was \$3,133,640.17, being made up of receipts for the year and balance carried forward. The assets of the trustees now amount to \$8,142,694.33, an increase for the year of \$1,186,790.45. Excess earnings for the year from investments amounted to \$148,461.33, and this, added to the surplus existing at the commencement of the fiscal year—\$46,352.74—made a total of \$149,814.07.

In 1915 Winnipeg's city council decided that no capital expenditure should be incurred that could possibly be avoided, and this policy has apparently been continued to date. In some of the cities the policy has been to issue debentures to cover expenditure, patriotic grants and other expenses, but all these Winnipeg has paid out of general taxes.

The surplus on investments is, according to the report of the trustees, growing rapidly, and while it is deemed advisable to take a reasonable amount from the yearly profits and add to the investment reserve account, it is considered right and proper that the ratepayers of to-day should benefit to some extent in the excess earnings of the sinking fund. In this connection it has been decided to take out of this year's surplus \$51,258 and place to the credit of one of the money by-laws, thus saving the taxpayer a yearly contribution of about \$25,000.

The general taxpayers during the coming year will also be relieved of an annual payment of \$83,000 hitherto paid into a sinking fund by the city at large but which, owing to the successful workings of the city water works, will now be taken care of by that department, which for the fiscal year, 1916-17, showed a surplus of \$93,000.

The gross debt of the city at April 30 last, stood at \$40,553,679.82.

Tax Mills Higher But Call Lighter.

Winnipeg's tax rate for the fiscal year 1917-1918, will be seventeen mills. In other words, for every \$1,000 assessment the levy will be seventeen dollars. The increase from \$15.70 mills, which was last year's tax, is accounted for by the fact that since 1916 realty assessment has been placed on a more equitable basis and reduced by over \$25,000,000, almost entirely on land.

This showing has created an excellent impression on ratepayers generally, who are aware that the city fathers have had to provide in their new estimates for increases in civic salaries averaging ten per cent. Larger calls have also come in from the municipal hospitals, street commissioner's department, fire service, water works, and health department. The provincial patriotic levy over which the city has no control has also been increased by half a mill, while the public school board estimated expenditure, also beyond the control of the city, shows an increase of \$121,000—or from \$1,118,000 in 1916, to \$1,239,000 for 1917.

In face of all this, and notwithstanding that the mill rate is higher, a smaller cash call will, however, be made, this being rendered possible by the strict economy practised during the year 1916-1917. For this period departments have, generally speaking, kept well within their estimates, with the result that balances in this respect total approximately \$180,000. In miscellaneous revenue also the city has been fortunate, this amounting to about \$500,000. Credit on the bond conversion from London to New York, also had its effect, with the result that taking things altogether the increase in mills is only a matter of book-keeping and the consequent demand on the taxpayer generally will be about the same.

Gas Will Cost More.

According to Theo. Hunt, K.C., city solicitor, Winnipeg city, has been placed in an awkward position as a result of the attitude of Public Utilities Commissioner Macdonald in connection with an application made to that official by the Winnipeg Electric Street Railway to get the price increased from \$1.50 per thousand cubic to \$1.80 per thousand.

According to letter to the board of control last week, the decision of the commissioner recently expressed means that if the city is to contest the proposed increase, it must forthwith engage experts to ascertain if the company's application is well founded. This, Mr. Hunt, thinks places the city in an awkward position. "If a private individual,

who was a consumer of gas, had gone to the commissioner," says Mr. Hunt in a communication to the board. "I do not think the commissioner would have saddled this consumer with the expense of ascertaining whether the application of the company was true or false. However, it being the city who, by the way, is not a consumer of gas, he has cast the burden on the city, to meet the conditions of the company." The increase asked for by the company has had the effect locally of reviving the agitation for municipal owned utilities, the city's hydro-electric undertaking which supplies light at three cents a kilowatt and power at half a cent, besides earning a surplus of approximately \$70,000 a year, being held up as an example.

One of the city's new comfort stations is now figuring in a claim for compensation. The question is: "Has the city the right to erect overground stations on sidewalks without paying compensation to owners of adjacent property?" Although differences have arisen in Toronto as to the city's powers in this direction, this is the first case of its kind in Winnipeg, and is considered in the light of a test case on the several recently erected.

Another matter of public interest in the effort which is to be made by the city to obtain a complete census of all the feeble-minded children and feeble-minded adults in Winnipeg, with a view to their complete segregation. A report of the Social Welfare Commission, a body recently formed for the administration of all city relief, stated that its relief list included many feeble minded persons. These, several members of the commission thought, should be placed in institutions and taken care of by the province. More especially, it was held should this apply to children who in many ways, it was contended, were a menace to other children and later on to the community.

At the same meeting also, it was alleged by Alderman Fowler, that the Winnipeg School Board ever since its inception had neglected the very fundamentals of home teaching. Howard T. Falk, secretary of the commission, a man well known in social service work, claimed that many of the desertions by husbands was due to young wives not being fitted for home duties. Many of the girls in factories and working in other industries, said Mr. Falk, were quite untrained in, and consequently unsuited for married life. Some of these frequently married well, but their husbands finding the home neglected, often left them, with the result that the family sooner or later became chargeable to the city. It was a matter, said Mr. Falk, that every city might take well to heart.

Portage La Prairie.

Portage la Prairie is anxious to secure light and power by the extension of the Winnipeg transmission lines to that prairie city. For several years the growth of Portage la Prairie, as an industrial centre, has been somewhat handicapped by the need of cheaper electrical power, and the city council recently decided to make every effort to secure a generous supply of that commodity. Several aldermen of Portage recently visited Winnipeg and conferred with members of the board of control and officials of the hydro-electric system advancing a proposal to extend the Winnipeg lines to Portage, the local plant having been found unequal for the steadily-increasing demands. At this conference the Winnipeg officials considered that the project would be feasible under normal conditions, but felt that owing to the prevailing high cost of materials it might not be practical at the present time to make the fifty-six miles extension asked for. The matter was, however, been laid over for further consideration.

St. Boniface.

All civic employees of the city of St. Boniface, the French suburb of Winnipeg, will be granted a wage increase of twenty per cent. This decision was recently arrived at by the city council after a heated debate behind closed doors, at which Alderman W. H. Leck suggested that the present was no time to put an extra burden on the taxpayers and that the proper thing to do would be to file the application. In place of this twenty per cent., members of the police and fire department have had reinstated their former wage schedule, which provides for an increase of five dollars every six months until the maximum pay is reached.