

Municipal and County Councils.

The present session of the Legislature will be noted for the number of Bills introduced to change the Municipal and County Councils as at present constituted. Hon. Mr. Hardy's bill for reducing the number of county councillors is a very important measure. The act is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the submission of the question of reducing the number of county councillors in any county to the electors, and makes provision that in every county where the council of the county is composed of more than twenty members, and in other counties where the council is composed of twenty members or less, if the council by resolution now directs, the clerk of the county shall, at the general municipal election to be holden in the year 1897, submit to the local electors of every municipality in the county the question of whether they are favorable to the adoption of the act or opposed thereto. The first twenty-one sections of the act are devoted to the procedure upon taking the vote. Section 15 provides for the submission of the question in any year subsequent to 1897 in which the act is not in force.

Part 2 of the act relates to the constitution of the county councils after the act goes into operation. Section 22 declares that the county council shall, in counties containing not more than 40,000 inhabitants, be composed of nine members; in counties containing more than 40,000 and less than 60,000, of eleven members; and in counties containing 60,000 or a greater number, of thirteen members. Section 23 provides that nominations shall be made in writing, signed by at least twenty-five municipal electors in the county and deposited with the clerk on or before the 1st day of December. If more candidates are nominated than the number of county councillors to be elected in the county, notice is to be given by the county clerk of the nomination made, and this notice is to be sent to the clerk of each of the local municipalities, together with voting papers, in the form prescribed by the act.

At a meeting of each local municipal council, held on the third Monday of January, the reeve and deputy-reeve are to fill up and sign the voting papers. Each reeve or deputy-reeve is to be entitled to a number of votes equal to the number of councillors to be elected, and may give all his votes to one candidate, or may distribute them, as he thinks best. The clerk of the municipality is to transmit the voting papers to the clerk of the county, who is to open the packages and count the votes in the presence of the county judge or sheriff, or in the absence of both of these officials, in the presence of the county court clerk, and is to enter the votes given for each candidate in a book kept for that purpose, and forthwith declare the persons elected who have received the highest number of votes.

Mr. Hardy's bill is quite satisfactory as far as size of councils and manner of nomination of candidates is concerned. The plan of election of the county councils proposed is far from perfect. It is dangerous to transfer from the people to the newly elected councils the right to appoint the county councils when that right could be exercised by the people direct at the annual municipal elections. The tendency of municipal reform is to do away with the ward system; under the proposed bill, the reeves and deputy-reeves as at present would vote for the county councillors. In townships divided into wards having but one deputy-reeve, the reeve would have for the smallest council 9 votes and the deputy-reeve a similar number. If the deputy-reeves were all elected by the people, we would not raise the objection, but when elected by the ward, they represent a small proportion of the electors and are given equal voting power to the reeves, who in all cases represents the whole township. Villages have the same voting power as a township without deputy-reeves, and paying probably ten times the county rate. If a plan of election similar to that proposed is desirable, let each local council at its first meeting be authorized to exercise a voting power according to equalized value. This would be following the system adopted in financial corporations for electing a board of directors and is most equitable. In last issue we referred to the plan of election of county councillors in districts independent of the local councils and for a term of years. This would no doubt be the most satisfactory and desirable system of election calculated in every way to raise the standard of membership of that time honored body.

CITY AND TOWN COUNCILS.

Mr. Stratton's bill respecting city and town councils is as follows: This act is to be called the City and Town Council Act, 1896. It is divided into two parts. Part 1, provides for the act coming into operation in every city and town in which the by-law for its adoption has received the assent of the municipal electors. The by-law is to be submitted upon the petition being presented to the council, signed by one-tenth in number of the municipal electors of the city or town. The by-law is not to be submitted after the 1st of September in any year, and if defeated, is not to be re-submitted within a period of two years thereafter.

Part 2, of the act provides with respect to cities and towns in which the act is in force, as follows:

1. Aldermen and councillors are to be elected by general vote, and it is the intention of the bill to reduce the number by about one-third, all of whom shall be elected each year, and it also provides that in case of a vacancy occurring in the representation of the city or town that the municipal council shall have power to

appoint a qualified person to fill the vacant chair.

Every municipal elector may vote for a number of candidates not exceeding the number to be elected, but no one is to vote more than once for any candidate and no person is to vote at more than one polling place in the same city or town.

The proposition to elect councillors irrespective of ward boundaries is the correct one, and Mr. Stratton's bill should receive a strong support.

The Toronto Star referring to the bill for reduction of number of members of county councillors says:—This scheme is not likely to be popular, and it is sure to be unstable. It would be much better to go at once to the people for a choice. This could be easily done by letting the electors vote all over the county for candidates, previously nominated, and the voting could be done instead of, not in addition to, the voting for reeves and deputies. In that event, each local council could safely be left to choose its own chairman for the year, as the county council now does.

All that would be necessary in the way machinery would be a ballot paper with the names of candidates nominated, and instead of giving each voter as many votes as there are members to be elected, each should be allowed only one vote. This would be simple, and would be just as effective in getting at the real wish of the people in the matter. A council so chosen would be much more of a unit, and the county would be freer from local squabbles and distractions, than under the present absurd law. A man would have to be fairly well known over the county to have any chance of election, and his record would have to be fairly good. Mr. Hardy's bill will do to start a discussion, but it should give place to something better.

London Advertiser:—The number of grand jurors has been reduced by one-half, and the province is yearly a good deal of money in pocket, while the public interest has not suffered in any respect. A strong argument in favor of the reduction of county councillors is found in the fact that Ontario is now pretty well settled. The pioneer labor of settling up the lands has been largely completed in the older sections, and nearly all the work of management is now efficiently undertaken by the township boards. County bodies are necessary for the management of general county affairs, but there is absolutely no reason why any county should require a body one-half the size of the Legislature to transact the largely routine business now delegated to it.

Hamilton Times:—We fancy the country would be quite as well served by one from each township in the county councils and two from each ward in the city councils as by the present overgrown bodies of legislators. Canada is undoubtedly over-governed.