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Municipal Government and its Influence on Our Social Life

We are not yet fully conscious of the changing conditions of our social life so far as they affect and are in turn affected by municipal government, for the reason that in practically all the provinces of Canada municipal legislation has been, and is actually, in advance of the public mentality of the average citizen. The broad principles of local government, as written down in the statutes of the Old Country, and which are based on the experience of many centuries of successful warfare for the rights of the people, are also on the statute books of the provincial legislatures of this country, so that it may truly be said that every citizen has the right to determine the local authority of his own community. The question is: Has he got the will?

These same principles not only cover the purely municipal administration of the community—as we understand the term to-day—but its social welfare as well; a fact not always appreciated as it should be by our social welfare agencies, that give so much thought, for instance, to the amelioration of the slum life of the city. The consequence is that the average citizen, not having had the opportunity to study for himself the ethics of municipal government and his own responsibility towards its proper administration, has unconsciously brought about the delegation of the duties—but not the power—of the council, to other agencies. The result is that throughout the land social welfare agencies of all kinds have

been established to mitigate the evils of vice that should be undertaken entirely by the police, the probation officers, the health officers, etc. This is not to say that civic employees are inefficient, but that through lack of funds they have not the proper facilities to fully cope with the work. Yet should the council increase the taxes to provide the necessary funds it is charged with extravagance, often by the same people who subscribe generously to the outside agencies. Such an anomaly is not conducive to the best civic spirit, and is always a deterrent to good government.

Comparing local taxes in Canada with those of Great Britain, we find that the average taxpayer in the Old Country pays fifty to sixty per cent more for his municipal service than does the taxpayer of Canada, meaning that if the Englishman, Scotchman, Welshman or Irishman get a better service, he pays for it.

There is no doubt about municipal government largely influencing our social life. The one is the counterpart of the other, inasmuch as much of our happiness is directly affected by our environments.—The community that has well constructed, cleanly and well lighted streets and sidewalks, efficient drainage and pure water, good health, parks and playgrounds, proper protection, etc., and when the by-laws are strictly carried out, is infinitely better to live in than the dirty carelessly administered community, where happiness is impossible. Yet in each of the two communities the citizens have the same power. The difference is simply one of self-determination.