

Monetary Times

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of Canada

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Telephone: Main 7404, Branch Exchange connecting all departments.
Cable Address: "Montimes, Toronto."
Winnipeg Office: 1206 McArthur Building. Telephone Main 3409.
G. W. Goodall, Western Manager.

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CO-OPERATION OF CANADIAN MUNICIPALITIES

WHILE municipal affairs are essentially of provincial interest, problems throughout Canada are similar, and municipal legislation of most of the provinces does not differ fundamentally, so that subjects of common interest can profitably be discussed by municipal representatives. The 1919 convention of the Union of Canadian municipalities, held this week in Kingston, Ontario, was therefore a somewhat disappointing affair, because municipal issues were sidetracked by topics not of special interest to the institutions represented. An account will be found elsewhere in this issue. The discussion of the high cost of living was a particularly unsatisfactory part of the meeting. Another unfortunate incident was the introduction of a resolution asking that the government, in view of the destruction of the Port Colborne elevator, should consider reopening one in Kingston, now standing idle. These and other similar problems are national in scope, and even if they could be intelligently discussed by municipal delegates, it is certain that the conclusions reached would not carry much weight. The resolutions actually carried, however, mainly concerned municipal questions.

The proposal that the Union should be reorganized should be taken up and carefully worked out. Until a constructive program is developed, municipalities cannot be expected to send delegates, and until the Union convention becomes really representative, it will not carry much weight. Municipal officers change frequently, and in almost every case the work is merely a side issue, so the real work of the Union must be done by permanent officers, who can carry on a continuous program, adjusting it to new conditions from year to year by means of resolutions submitted for the approval of the delegates.

The Dominion convention should therefore be a purely business meeting, while those of the various provincial

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organizations can be left more open for the initiation of new questions. Canada is spread over too wide a territory in proportion to the population to permit of such a general convention, on any particular subject, to be successful. A number of other organizations are finding the same difficulty, and seeking a practical solution by developing the local meetings, confining the national one to a conference of business executives. It is particularly easy for the municipal Union to find a solution in this way, because there are so many topics of interest only to the members within one province.

The 1919 conference was particularly short in financial topics, and this is at the present time the one thing of outstanding interest to them. There is no other organization to take up assessments, tax rates, etc., and broad comparisons of the different provincial systems could be profitably made. The federal government housing program was not even mentioned. It is important that municipalities at the present time should proceed carefully in the public works, for the present high costs would impose a great burden upon it in the way of capital charges upon future years. Nothing was said about the organization of fairs, boards of trade and other organizations for municipal development, while much time was lost on subjects from which no profitable conclusion could result.

The value of a nation-wide organization of municipalities is undoubted. Occasionally there are questions, such as that of repatriation, concerning which the Dominion government desires to communicate direct, and in such cases the organization is very useful. It has been suggested that an officer should be appointed to form a connecting link between the Dominion government and the municipalities, but, as communications of this kind are only occasional, it is probable that the heads of the organization will be sufficient for this purpose. An active bureau of information should be operated by the organization, and this one phase of its activities would require the continuous attention of a permanent officer.