

CONVENTION OF B. C. MUNICIPALITIES— (Continued)

left nothing to be desired, and I know that they have every wish to place on the Statutes of British Columbia an Act which will be workable, and at the same time preserve in the best manner the financial stability of municipalities throughout the Province. From some delay in starting on the work, the new Act cannot be presented in detail to this convention. In some respects this may be as well, as it would be impossible for us to discuss all the details and the phraseology of drafting. This, in any case, would have to be left to those in whose charge the Act is placed. The proposed changes, however, are before us for full discussion, and I feel sure that the Government will give due consideration to any suggestion made by this Union.

One of the most important innovations is the establishment of a Local Government Board, which will have a very wide effect upon this Province. It has been suggested that powers to be conferred upon a Board of this kind may be too great, also that it is rather late in the day, seeing that in many instances municipalities have already stretched their credit almost to the breaking point. I am firmly convinced, however, that the establishment of some Board of this nature will be of great value in promoting financial stability. The fact alone that the Board will be active all the year round will be of immense benefit to municipalities. The Board will no doubt have power to settle difficulties existing between adjacent municipalities who will have the privilege of putting their cases before them, and obtaining immediate settlement; as it is at present, we have to wait each year until the sitting of the Legislature to obtain relief. Public utilities, also, will, in all probability, be placed in their hands. It is possible that through the wide powers which will in all likelihood be conferred upon this Board, it may appear to this convention that the administration of municipal affairs is to be handed over to a body appointed by the Provincial Government; but some of us who attended the convention at Kamloops when the position of Municipal Inspector was created had the same fear, yet in the working out of the position, I think I am safe in saying that no municipality has been disappointed either in the creation of the office or the manner in which it has been administered.

A very important clause in the new Act is that of the compulsory tax sale. After nine years' close study of municipal affairs, I am convinced that such compulsory tax sale will go a long way towards placing our municipalities on a sound financial basis. It is absolutely impossible to carry on under the present system. No municipality can collect only an average of 40 per cent to 60 per cent of the money owing to them, and keep on paying out 100 cents on the dollar for what they owe; and live. We have tried in the past many methods of temporary borrowing against arrears of taxes, either by treasury note or otherwise, but it is only putting off the evil day of reckoning. I know that all municipalities in British Columbia are quite prepared to do everything in their power to save the home of the taxpayer, and I believe provision can be made to this end; but it is impossible to save the speculative property of those who have acquired more than they can carry. When all is said and done, our duty when elected must be to carry on the work of our respective municipalities in as sane a manner as possible, collecting our dues, and meeting our obligations. Our present policy is undoubtedly working a hardship on the ratepayer who pays his taxes. If no tax sales are held, it is only a matter of a few years before no one will wish to purchase property, as the accrued taxes will have mounted to more than purchasers will wish to pay. In the meantime, municipalities are only carrying a false asset by deluding themselves with the idea that arrears of taxes are worth 100 cents on the dollar.

I am asking Messrs. Baird and McDiarmid to address the convention before the new Act comes up for discussion, so that the important changes advocated can be explained to us. I know that keen interest is sure to be taken by all present in the new Act, and as much latitude as possible will be given for discussion; at the same time, I would ask that as far as possible all delegates will try and keep to the points at issue, so that we may be able to finish our business in good time.

Last spring, on behalf of the Union, I attended a meeting held between the Executive of the Government and representatives of municipalities and Boards of Trade, with respect to the question of taxes and Government relief to municipalities in connection therewith. The Premier, the Hon. Mr. John Oliver, spoke very strongly as to the re-

sponsibilities of municipalities and the costly system of administration; and I should like to make a radical suggestion to this Union, namely, that where municipalities, whose interests are more or less identical, adjoin, the cost of operation might be merged in one central office respective Councils being elected as at present, but the detail work carried out at one central point, which would save a considerable expense, as the clerical, engineering, school, police and fire departments could be conducted under one head. Having the taxes kept separate would be a matter of bookkeeping. Should the convention thing this idea worthy of consideration, I should be glad if they would instruct the incoming executive to look into it, and report to the convention of 1919.

In conclusion, I wish to express my sincere thanks for the assistance rendered me during the past year by the Vice-President, Secretary-Treasurer, Solicitor and Members of the executive, also again to record my appreciation of the honour conferred upon me by last year's convention. The time I have devoted to the work of the Union has been a great pleasure, and I sincerely trust that benefit may accrue to our municipalities as the result of our efforts."

The Report was adopted.

SOLICITOR'S REPORT.

The work of the solicitor of the Union for this last year has consisted altogether in the drafting of legislation, a memorandum of which has been sent to you in printed form. I want to discuss that memorandum, and I understand I have an opportunity this afternoon; the conditions on which it was based, the way the work has been done, and that sort of thing has taken practically the whole of the time that I have had since the meeting of last year.

At the last session there was no legislation of any importance; three or four emergent clauses which were passed as being emergent, but everybody was waiting for the passing of the new Act. Those municipalities which needed special legislation received the same by private bill which did not affect the rest, and consequently the solicitor had nothing to do with that.

SECRETARY-TREASURER'S REPORT.

"I have only a short verbal report to make as Secretary. All the resolutions that were referred to the Executive Committee were taken before the Executive of the Union, and at that meeting in Victoria and arranged a meeting on the Attorney-General the whole re-drafting of the Municipal Act. We met in Victoria and arranged a meeting with the Attorney-General, who agreed that commissioners would be appointed and we urged upon the Attorney-General the necessity of these commissioners being placed upon the work at once, so that each municipal council could receive a copy of the new draft in plenty of time before coming to this convention. We stated that we would like those copies before the first of August, and the Attorney-General said that he would take the matter up with the Municipal Committee and he would do all in his power to obtain them before the first of August. We met the Municipal Committee, who passed a resolution that as the Attorney-General had stated that commissioners would be appointed for the re-drafting of the Act that no amendments to the Act except those that were absolutely necessary, would be allowed to be brought at the last session, and consequently we turned them over to the commissioner for the re-drafting, except those that were absolutely necessary for some of the municipalities who were in a difficult position with the Act in its present state.

Shortly after, the executive and myself took the matter up with the Attorney-General to find out what had been done with the re-draft. But it was impossible at that time to get a meeting of the Government to pass on the drafting of the new Act, so that the delay was not the fault of the Attorney-General nor of your executive, but we thought that the municipalities would have plenty of time to take it up with their own councils, so that the delegates would come to this convention fully prepared. However, I understand the President has a suggestion that he is going to present during this meeting.

Now, all the other matters that came up during the year, I have taken up with the President and members of the executive. I may say that the work of the Secretary of the Union was a surprise to me, I think I answered about thirty communications in a week.

I submit the following statement:—