

The Ideal Form of Civic Government and Administration

By C. J. YORATH, City Commissioner, Saskatoon.

The subject of this paper is one which has of late received considerable attention throughout the American Continent and while many forms of Civic Government have been placed upon the statute book, there is no one single form which has received general approbation.

Matters of vital interest to the welfare and future development of the Dominion of Canada depend upon the legislative and administrative work of civic government and unless municipal law and regulations are based upon expert knowledge of municipal subjects with some degree of uniformity and unless the administrative work of local authorities is economically and efficiently carried out the best interests of the Dominion will be seriously affected.

To show that civic government is not a subject which can be solved in the best interests of the country as a whole by individual local authorities or Provincial Governments it is desirable that some of the most deplorable results of the present system or lack of system of civic government should be realized.

The combined general debt of towns and cities throughout Canada before the outbreak of war was \$516,979,614 whereas the debt of the Dominion at the same time was \$335,996,850 and the combined debt of the Provinces \$178,370,412 or the total municipal debt exceeded the combined debt of the Dominion and the Provincial Governments. From these figures it will be realized that if a reduction in taxation is to be made, some effective remedy should be applied to the government responsible for the largest expenditure of public monies, i.e., the local authorities.

Another national waste is the enormous annual fire loss throughout the Dominion. During the year 1914 the total loss by fire was \$24,300,000 or nearly twice the amount of interest upon the Dominion Debt which in the same year amounted to \$12,893,505.

Local authorities are largely responsible for this loss as it is part of their duty to pass building by-laws and regulations governing the construction of buildings, but because of the lack of knowledge, a uniform system of building regulations and by-laws throughout the Dominion and a desire to build up a community as rapidly and as cheaply as possible, ordinary precautions against the spread of fire are not taken.

Another great national loss and for which civic government is again largely responsible, is the infant mortality. It is estimated that the average annual deaths of infants under one year of age (according to Dr. C. A. Hodgetts, Medical Adviser, Commission of Conservation) is 25,000. This figure can only be approximated as the registration of births, deaths and marriages is under Provincial control and owing to the divergent methods and the entire lack of statistics, a definite figure cannot be given.

There are many other channels through which an enormous sum of public money is allowed to run to waste for lack of experienced control, but the above examples should be sufficient to emphasize the necessity of an immediate reform of civic government. Before discussing an ideal form of government it will be necessary to shortly describe what civic government means and in what respect present forms of government have failed.

Mr. Yorath's paper on "Ideal Civic Government" was published in full in the July and August issues of this Journal, and a few copies of which are still left. These will be mailed to anyone making application.

Discussion.

President—"It seems to me that we have had very valuable dissertations on the various forms of municipal government. This is a very valuable paper, and when all these papers are published we will have a lot of food for thought. We will have lots of opportunities to study them, and of deciding whether any one form is the ideal form, or whether we can arrive at a combined form of government from suggestions given to us in the various addresses."

Test of Civic Government.

Mayor Cater of Brandon—"What is the test of good city government? We have had a number of plans put

before us, but none of them have given us the reasons as to why their particular system is the best. The papers have been excellent, but it seems to me that they lack on that one point. They do not make any comparison by which we may judge as to the best forms of municipal government. I am reminded of a picture of a missionary working in Africa, showing a number of men who were holding placards representing the different dominations, each placard stating that the church it represented was the only true Christian church. In front of these dozen men holding the dozen placards was a poor unfortunate African and he didn't know what to choose. There have been no comparisons here to show why one of the various forms of government works out better in one city than another. In my judgment there are three or four outstanding tests of efficiency. There are three or four main factors of city government. The physical health of our community which we may measure by our death rate, is one. There is an educational test which we may measure by the efficiency of our school work, and by the sufficiency of accommodation provided for children. There is a moral test which may be measured to a certain extent by the percentage of crime in our respective communities. There is also an economical test, which might be measured by the tax rate per capita of our citizens. I have just had the pleasure of comparing Brandon with Lethbridge. I think we were all glad to hear a paper from the Mayor of Lethbridge. I believe that municipal governments are too large and unwieldy. I think that fewer and better men would give us better administration. The City of Lethbridge has an assessment of \$12,000,000, and its rate for all purposes is 32 mills, thereby raising a fund of \$384,000 per annum for municipal purposes. Its population is, I believe, 10,000 people, or thereabouts, which means that the average citizen of Lethbridge pays \$38.40 per capita for the municipal administration for all purposes. The City of Brandon has a population of about 17,000, and the assessment is \$14,000,000. For all purposes, including local improvements, the rate is 35 mills. We raise \$490,000 for all purposes. That brings the cost of government per capita in Brandon to \$28.82 against \$38.40 in Lethbridge. That is just a test. It may not be true, but I want to convey to the convention just what we want to get at. Everybody has advocated his form of government as the best there is. There is no comparative test of actual results of the municipalities governed in the various ways. To that extent the papers fall short. We have no results to guide us as to which is the better form of administration."

Dr. Atherton—"As one who is not a member of the Union of Canadian Municipalities, but who has a decided interest unofficially in the study of these problems, may I register my conviction after listening very carefully through most of the sitting that I believe a duty is incumbent upon us of expressing the thanks due to the committee that arranged this programme. To-night has been admirable, and the programme has advanced logically from one section to another. There has been no overlapping. It has not been absolutely perfect, because we should not be here to study the various forms of government if we could get the ideal form. That is impossible to do, but we can get an idea by the study of the different papers as we read them. There has been a great deal of orderly thought in the discussions. The speakers have avoided touching other grounds, and we should give every credit to the organizing committee who arranged the programme. I hope that you will circulate your journal (Canadian Municipal Journal) more. I do not know any other journal going out to the people with information of this kind. There should be a greater effort than we see now to spread the right ideas as to municipal government, and I hope the forthcoming number of the Journal will go far and wide, and rear up a school of Canadian thought on this important matter."