

Municipal Officers Association

As indicated in the February issue of the Journal, the municipal officers of Fort William and Port Arthur have formed a Municipal Officers Association, with the following objects:—

- A.—To encourage the study and promote a knowledge of the principles of municipal government.
- B.—To provide means of and to encourage social intercourse amongst the members for their improvement and benefit.
- C.—To deal with matters relating to the status of members.
- D.—To invite the formation of similar associations in other municipalities.

From a letter from J. M. Cosgrave, secretary treasurer of the new association we gather that two committees have been formed—one dealing with **Municipal System** and the other with **Municipal Management** in planning which Mr. Cosgrave says:

"During the past year, our city council has occasionally referred questions of administration to the Heads of Departments for consideration and recommendation, and these in many cases, dealt with matters that could not properly be substituted to any but the Heads of Departments.

The municipal management committee was formed to take care of these on behalf of the Association. This system of referring certain matters to Heads of Departments for consideration and report appears to be extending. It has been customary in Port Arthur, and has been recently adopted in Kingston and I believe in other Ontario cities.

The municipal system committee will be called on to bring matters bearing on municipal organization, administration and systems before the general meetings for discussion; in fact, to arrange the programs for these meetings."

In an address before the first meeting, Mr. R. R. Knight, City Engineer, Fort William in explaining the objects of the Association said in part:

"I contend that there is a distinct division between the duties of a Council and the officials. You may not agree with such a statement or my further enlargement of it, and I make the point as much for discussion as to express a conviction. This division is I claim Policy on the one hand and Executive on the other or in other words, it is the duty of the Council to define the policy or objective of any matter and that of the official to work out the details, or otherwise much valuable time is wasted and the result not good.

You may wonder what an Association of this kind can do in order to put into practice the policy laid down. First of all it must be accepted and understood that the Association will have the decided advantage of co-operation, not only among its actual members but with its honorary members namely, the members of the Council. Now having established some means whereby such co-operation can be consummated and brought into real evidence by meeting under the auspices of the Association it only remains in order to attain the object, to engender a wholesale feeling of communion and as soon as this state is created there is no reason why the Council should hesitate at leaving the executive work to a body of officers who will be in close touch with them constantly.

It would seem to me from a Councillor's view point to be an ideal state of affairs just to have the real work to perform that which calls for the best in a man, viz:—His expression of opinion and his argument on matters of policy by which the people are governed, and in leaving the details to the official he is excused all the irritation contingent thereto. The officer is trained to that work and can better handle it because of his training and further he has access to information which builds up the fabric of intelligent detail.

Occasions will arise when men of certain ideas, and even specialists in municipal systems and management may become elected to the aldermanic seat. This man may say of our Association "What can you benefit me?" We answer that "Your presence, Sir, is none the less cordially asked and if we have nothing to teach you, then we can learn from you," and that I think expresses the key note of our organization.

We are joining hands to learn one from the other, each to find out and perhaps profit from, the opinion of the "other fellow." That benefit is derived from discussions, is accepted throughout the universe and Associations, Conventions and Conferences in all parts of the world for the

purpose of bringing together men of different calibres and opinions and with diversified purpose and motives to get by a majority of opinion sane government.

Ours is only a small affair compared with others but we hope to make it larger by interesting other Municipalities. We think we are working in the right direction and we are doing the pioneer work for what we believe will be a valuable organization from the point of view of Municipal Management.

I am now going to explain the objects of the Association as laid down in our constitution and taking the question of "Status of Members" first I wish to make the following remarks:

There are a few who at the first mention of an Association of Municipal officers would immediately think of organized strikes, trades unions, and such like, and I want to state here that nothing is further from the objective than such procedures.

Let us look at the City Official. He is a man trained in Municipal affairs, he has spent years in the service and is a man who would find it difficult to accustom himself to any other class of work. The official becomes swathed in the lore of his work, there are attachments and procedures peculiar to his work which make him singular. You can "tell him in the street"—"he looks the part"—"You could pick him out of a crowd." It is not his fault and he is not complaining but he wants and deserves some measure of protection.

In the transaction of his business he is bound to run foul of some people and in the honest execution of his duties will be questioned. His only reply in most instances is "The Act says so," or "I can only obey the law or statutory legislation." There have been many occasions when officials have been "asked to resign" for lesser reasons. What we as an Association hope to do is, to bring this man's case into the full light, give him a chance to explain himself before the Association and having the co-operation of the Council the real issue and not an imaginary one thrashed out. In this case, our aims are towards mutual better understanding as between officer and councillor.

Another objective of the Association respecting the status of members is to obtain legislative measure for providing superannuation for civic officials. This object needs very little explanation but perhaps it may be worth while pointing out the particular claims a Municipal servant has for some visible means of support after his useful term is over. His fellow worker, the government official has his pension and the two are allied in many respects.

The social objective of the Association is one which needs little or no explanation but I wish to say that there is no better way to keep men together in an Association of any kind than an occasional "affair" at which the cares and duties of life are forgotten and man meets man under conditions conducive to better understanding and relationship.

The educational value of the association will be a great asset. There is nothing more enlightening than healthy discussion. To the junior member who has the bulk of his career before him, the experiences of his seniors expressed in argument will be invaluable.

It is our intention that every one shall benefit and no one is going to act as either teacher or pupil. We want discussion and expressions of opinion and everyone will be the wiser and better and the municipalities will reap the benefit in the long run. To a newly elected councillor or alderman the workings of the Municipal organization will be strange and years of experience along ordinary lines would be necessary in order to grasp the whole scheme. We invite our new comrade to our meetings for his and our benefit.

To encourage the study and promote the knowledge of the principles of Municipal government are among our objects and one cannot imagine a wider field for discussion and expressions of ideas and convictions and I think that a programme of subjects for discussion should be mapped out with names of members delegated to read papers on those subjects at our monthly meetings."

So far the work has been confined to the municipal officials of the Twin Cities but to be really effective it must be nation wide and as already mentioned one of the objects is to write similar associations in other municipalities and enquiries from other municipalities have already been made, which the parent organization hopes will culminate in a Canadian organization.