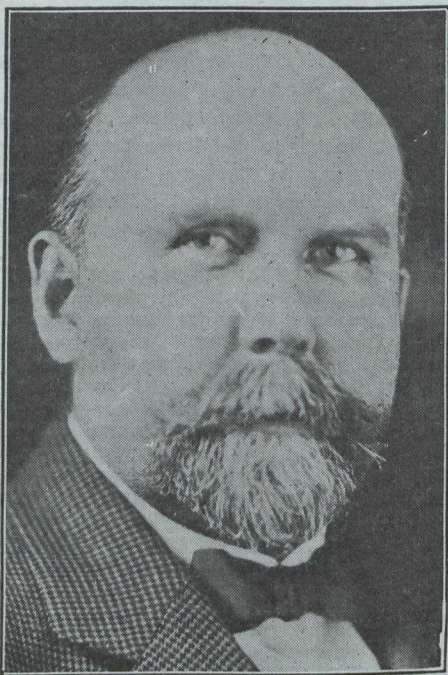


The Forum

Conducted by HOWARD S. ROSS, K.C.



MONTREAL'S COMMISSION GOVERNMENT.

It is rather out of place to ask a resident of Montreal (whose citizens cannot be trusted to govern themselves) to edit a page devoted to government.

Even though it is a temporary arrangement, the appointing of a commission is a very great step backward and particularly at a time when the idea of "self-determination" is in the air and in the thoughts of forward looking people.

Under the new system which goes into force April 2, 1918, the appointed Commission of five will be supreme. The members are to give all their time to the business of the city. They will send to the Council (which is shorn of most of its power) only the annual budget, the supplementary budget, reports for the diversion of funds, appropriation of loans, taxes and license matters, by-laws, **except those relating to municipal employees and matters of annexations and franchises and privileges.**

It is to adopt rules and regulations for its own conduct, hold enquiries as the present Board of Control does, and have all the other powers that the Board of Control now possesses. The duties of the mayor are defined to be those of "the representative of the city" and the legislature very graciously allows him and the alderman jointly and severally to "make representations" to the commission. He presides at council meetings and may vote in case of a tie, and is to be ex-officio member of the council committees which committees are generously allowed to study city problems of their own will or at the request of the Commission.

If the mayor refuses to sign documents, such as by-laws and bonds, etc., within the space of 48 hours, the president of the Commission may sign such documents.

A clause of the charter provides that if the mayor or any alderman or commissioner is responsible in any way for the wrongful expenditure or diversion of money from the use to which it is voted shall be held personally liable, lose his seat and be disqualified from holding office for a period of two years. It would be more apt to be of real service to the voters if the clause provided a penalty for any mayor, alderman or commissioner who voted to divert the income from franchises to private pockets instead of the public treasury.

With such a clause and proper enforcement under it the present absurd position might be reversed, and instead of the city being left to carry on the unproductive services such as sewerage, fire and police, it would enjoy a good revenue from its productive public services to which the citizens pay millions of dollars each year. And under this head it surely would not be unreasonable to include community created land values. Why the difficulty in

getting revenue when the voters earn and pay over so many millions each year for public utilities, including rent? And then after paying such huge sums they are called upon to pay taxes most of the taxes being a penalty upon industry.

The aldermen are to have a term of two years, while the Commissioner's term is practically for life, because it was contended at Quebec the Commissioners "in the discharge of their duties will make enemies." One at once wonders why Commissioners who are carrying on the business of the city in the interest of the voters as a whole should make enemies? On the contrary, if they really acted solely in the public interest (not the public interest as they the Commissioners, or those who appoint them see it, but the public good, as the voters who supply all the revenue see it) they would be acclaimed.

HOME RULE FOR CITIES.

It is perfectly clear now that Montreal is to be managed at Quebec until the voters of Montreal are united enough and insistent that the city shall have ample powers of self-government. The granting of valuable franchises and the authorizing of costly expropriations could not have been made without the consent of the legislature. It does seem strange that this being the case the legislature should disclaim liability for the so-called financial difficulties of the city. It cannot be truthfully said that the workers of Montreal are not earning and paying out large sums for public utilities, the real trouble is they are not paying enough into the city treasury and too much into private pockets.

If the voters had been consulted, they might have chosen the council-manager plan, put forward by the Bureau of Municipal Research. Even the influential organizations really wish. What more logical than to ask the voters? really wish. What more logical than to ask the voters? If they can make a wise choice in the election of a member of the legislature, why cannot they be trusted to select aldermen with powers of self-government?

Since 1832 the cities of Great Britain have been among the best governed in the world, because they have had a large measure of self-government.

The provincial legislature would still have control of matters of general welfare, such as control over elections, laws relating to health, safety, the prevention of crime and education.

In the United States a number of cities have secured commission (elected) government by adopting home rule charters; notably Denver, Spokane, Tacoma, Dayton and Springfield. If the legislature, instead of the council, exercised the power to grant franchises to public service corporations, there would be nothing to prevent the granting of a franchise (as has often been done) in opposition to the wishes of the voters, no matter how responsive the elected council might be. In the United States the state legislatures have been more generous than usual in the granting of wide powers to elective commission governed cities.

In several states the home rule section of their constitution long ago granted to municipalities the right to frame and adopt or amend their own charters by majority vote, as in Washington, Oregon, California, Arizona, Colorado and Ohio, and in those statesman cities began to insert the initiative, referendum and recall long before the commission plan was adopted by them. Some of these cities have not yet adopted the commission plan.

In the United States the elective commission is provided for by general law in twenty-seven states. In New York, Massachusetts, Virginia and Ohio optional laws specify several different forms of municipal government from which cities may choose.

In Michigan, Minnesota and Texas, general laws grant broad home rule powers to municipalities and in most cases these laws provide for the use of direct legislation in local affairs.

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION IN CANADA.

Calgary has adopted it for the election of its aldermen. British Columbia has passed an act which enables its municipalities to use the Hare system of the single transferable vote. Nelson, New Westminster and two smaller municipalities have adopted the system. In Vancouver, opposition is being met, but P.R. has the support of the Rotary Club and the labor organizations.

Sydney B. Johnson, who did splendid service for the movement as General Secretary of the Canadian Society