

Municipal Affairs in Manitoba

H. E. MORTON.

In Winnipeg's financial estimates for the fiscal year 1917-1918, now being compiled by the board of control and expected to be completed about the middle of this month, they will likely call for a tax rate of 16.50 mills, compared with the 15.70 mills rate for the fiscal year ending April 30 last. Considering the recent paring of speculative values by which the city's assessment was reduced by over \$25,000,000, the fulfilment of such a prophecy will be considered highly satisfactory, as with values placed on a more sane basis, the call to many will be about the same or even less, despite greatly increased expenditure in departmental salaries and other uncontrollable outlays.

Before, however, the next year's estimates call for preparation, the city's system of taxation may have undergone a complete change. Much of the objection to the present system of civic taxation—and Winnipeg's is no exception—rests upon its lack of proportion to income and profits. In the payment for municipal services enjoyed by all citizens, earnings or ability ought certainly to form the main guide to taxation, for discrimination as to the amount of use made by individuals of essential service is impossible. Essentials are equally essentials whatever the amount of income enjoyed, and the principal of payment for them in proportion to ability has long been recognized. Even were it feasible to determine in what degree a resident utilized them, the payment required from, say, a citizen supporting a large family upon slender earnings, would become unjustly burdensome.

Civic expenditures seldom decrease, hence the importance of arriving at a just basis of individual contribution to the common expense charges. Education already being paid for, brings with it a growing knowledge which adds to the services demanded from the civic authority, every year bringing with it new ideas and new public needs, so that with all the talk of economy by candidates for municipal honors and even its extensive practice, few cities can point to permanent lessening of outgoings.

City Council Petitions Dominion Government.

The outstanding features of business transacted at the last meeting of the city council was a resolution moved by Controller Chas. F. Gray, the well known consulting electrician, who has been quite a factor to be counted with since his entry into the council last December. This resolution, which after a hot debate, was passed with only one dissented, read as follows:

"That the council, in view of the almost prohibitive prices now being asked for even such foodstuffs as are the necessities of life, and in the belief that the food situation in Canada will shortly reach an acute stage, do urge upon the Federal government the necessity of immediately mobilizing the food supplies throughout the Dominion, and of establishing a central control, or of appointing a food supervisor who will regulate prices; and

"That the council do urge upon the government the necessity of establishing government abattoirs and cold storage plants, or, if private ownership is continued, of limiting by statute the period of cold storage commodities."

The resolution was telegraphed to Sir Robert Borden and the Hon. Robert Rogers, and satisfactory replies were received from both ministers.

School Board to Have Dental Clinic.

Provision has been made in the estimates of the Trustees of the Winnipeg School Board, which controls the education of nearly 32,000 children, for a free dental clinic, that at the General Hospital being much appreciated, being, it is declared, quite inadequate for the children's needs.

The annual report of the department of medical inspection of Winnipeg Schools just published shows that of 4,480 new pupils admitted during 1916, and medically examined, no fewer than 2,533 new pupils of these were found to be in some way defective in health, 1,168 suffering from dental defects.

The medical officers, Dr. Mary Crawford and Dr. A. W. Allum, in their report, emphasized the necessity for the establishment of the clinic to be used exclusively by school children, and stated that 75 per cent. of the children examined were found to have some untreated defect of the temporary or permanent teeth, leading to serious physical ills, in some cases even causing facial deformities. Extra inducements are also to be held out to scholars to take advantage of the free baths provided at the schools.

City Trying Semaphore For Traffic.

The new traffic regulating semaphore service is being tried out at the intersection of Portage avenue and Donald

street, one of the busiest corners in the city and opposite the big Eaton departmental store. The semaphore is worked by a lever and has "stop" and "go" signs for directing traffic. Up to the present, satisfaction is being expressed at the better regulating of traffic, and it is just possible that semaphores of an improved pattern may be instituted at all the important and busy street intersections in the city.

For the still better control of traffic, white lines are to be painted across the asphalt, between which pedestrians will be expected, or at least advised, to walk when crossing, and over which vehicular traffic will be barred while the "stop" sign is being shown.

Want Jitney Men to Carry Bonds.

Following up representations made by letter to the civic board of control a delegation of automobile owners, including members of the Winnipeg Automobile Club, waited on the civic license committee recently urging that jitney drivers be compelled to furnish a bond of sufficient amount to cover damages which they might inflict on persons or property through reckless driving or otherwise. Business firms, said the spokesman, insured their truck drivers to cover possible damages, some carrying as high as \$10,000, and jitney drivers should be placed on the same level. Individual drivers, it was realized, might not be able to insure, but the association to which they belonged could, it was thought, probably make arrangements with a bonding company for a joint bond.

The Prevention of Fires.

A somewhat serious statement was recently made in the annual statement of the Board of Trade relative to the efficiency or otherwise of the Fire Department in dealing with big fires, the discussion being reminiscent of the controversy which arose shortly after the big Stovel fire in May, 1916.

Local newspapers commenting favorable on the report, feel that the expense to which the City might be put in the creation of a practically independent department charged with the carrying out of inspections and the recommendation to the council of the legislation required to make the prevention of fires effective and thorough, ought to be more than repaid by the reductions in fire insurance premiums resulting from the lessening of the fire risk. In this connection the example of Toronto is quoted. That city inaugurated last year, a fire prevention staff of three men, soon to be enlarged to five. To quote the statement of the Toronto Bureau of Municipal Research: "All appointees are experienced men, and, when a completely organized fire school is established, should prove excellent instructors of the uniformed force in methods of fire prevention inspection, so that every fireman may in time become a fire preventer as well as a fire fighter."

The report of the Winnipeg Board of Trade will no doubt have the effect of reminding the city council that it is high time to take into consideration the advisability of drafting more stringent regulation, and of perhaps giving owners notice to remove or demolish within a stated period all the many wooden shacks, stores, or buildings of similar inflammable nature which abound in the down-town area, endangering the many modern office blocks and fine bank buildings for which Winnipeg is noted.

Affairs in Brandon.

They proposed amalgamation of the Police and Fire Departments is still very much alive as a local issue, judging by the stir it created at a meeting of the committee of the city council recently. The reading of the report of the police and fire chiefs put the fat in the fire. The report, briefly stated, found objections to the satisfactory working of the scheme, and prayed the council not to carry the idea any further. To be thus flouted, as some of the aldermen considered they were, was too much, and the final upshot was, that the report was referred back to the two chiefs with definite instructions to present a plan whereby the scheme might be given a trial.

A somewhat crushing rejoinder was recently made by superintendent Alfred White to the suggestions that have frequently been made of late that the education of the children of Brandon was excessively costly. At a regular meeting of the school board held recently, Mr. White went into figures which tended to show that direct school expenditure in Brandon was slightly below the average of similar cities, while on the other hand the total expenses of the city were nearly five per cent. above those western cities with which comparison had been made.