

THE MUNICIPAL COMMISSION:—The report of the Municipal Commissioners was laid on the table of the House yesterday. It begins with a general sketch of municipal institutions in England, Scotland, Ireland, the United States and of several Provinces of Canada.

Coming to Ontario, it is said that in this country, as in the United States, the chief difficulties are found in the government of the larger cities.

While the work of the civic departments is done under the immediate supervision and direction of committees of the Council, it cannot be expected that men of large business experience will be found willing to become members of the Council.

Complaints are heard of waste, extravagance, petty and gross jobbery; taxation and expenditure increase enormously, but the sewerage remains imperfect, pavements and sidewalks in a wretched condition, the streets of some towns indescribably filthy, the water supply unsatisfactory.

The question, "What is the remedy?" was put to a large number of persons. The Toronto gentlemen who appeared before the committee (all Aldermen or ex-Aldermen) were almost unanimously in favor of the abolition of the ward system. There was a general feeling in favor of increasing the length of the Aldermanic term of office. On the question of the division of power, nearly all the Toronto gentlemen thought that the time had come when the Mayor should have more power and more responsibility, and when the legislative and executive functions should be separated. At present the Mayor is little more than chairman of the Council and ex-officio member of the committees, and almost the only means he has of giving effect to his views or of preventing wrongdoing is to refuse to sign contracts, a course of doubtful legality.

Nearly all agreed that the Mayor should have the power to veto acts of the Council—opinion being divided as to whether, having that power, he should continue to preside over Council meetings.

It was generally agreed that the departments should be re-organised; one competent man should control all works of construction—streets, sewers, sidewalks and water pipes, public buildings and the works of gas and telegraph companies.

Every one complained of the present system of assessment, and some suggested that the treasurer should be the collector of all taxes and rates.

A proper system of audit was recommended in place of the present system, which has shown itself a failure.

To the question, "How should the heads of these departments be appointed and what should be their tenure of office?" there was a perplexing variety of answers—appointment by the Mayor, appointment by the Council on the Mayor's recommendation, and elected by the people, with a power of dismissal by two-thirds of the Council, on the recommendation of the Mayor.

The report states that the want of a thorough audit is felt throughout our whole municipal system. Nearly all the witnesses agreed that in large cities the auditor should devote his whole time to the work, that he should not only see that the accounts correspond with the vouchers, but examine each item so thoroughly that the concealment of fraud or misappropriation would be impossible. Some thought that no money should be paid until the auditor had passed the claim. The majority were of opinion that he should be nominated by the Mayor, appointed by the Council for three or five years and not removable except by a two-thirds vote of the Council.

The question of assessment is dealt with very fully. There was an agreement of testimony that real estate is not fairly assessed, that generally the assessment of personal property is ludicrously unfair and that the taxes derived from personalty and income do not compensate for the enormous amount of falsehood and misrepresentation they involve.

If these taxes are to be retained the relations of a real estate, personal estate and income must first be established on a just and reasonable basis. There should then be a thorough revision of the assessment, not merely a hearing of complaints made by particular taxpayers.

Reference is made to the great increase in municipal debt and taxation. It is suggested that a by-law increasing the debt should not be assented to except by a majority of all the voters on the list.

Government by commission is stated to be unnecessary where a municipality is properly organised.

The opinion of the commissioners is against the granting of special charters to cities.

Municipalities other than cities are not so fully dealt with, but the question of assessment is dealt with, and the necessity for a proper audit strongly urged.

THAT INDIAN CLAIM:—A return brought down in response to a motion by Mr. Awrey gives the interesting history of the award of \$28,672 to the Six Nation Indians for lands drowned by the building of the Welland Canal.

In the fall of 1887 Mr. Vankoughnet, of the Indian Department, prepared a statement of facts, from which it appeared that the Indians' claim was referred to the Dominion Board of Arbitrators in 1882, that the award was made; that on Nov. 2nd the Department of Railways and Canals admitted the liabilities of the Government to the Indians for the amount awarded, \$28,672 69, but that subsequently it was discovered that the consent of the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec was required. It is not stated that any further steps were taken until the preparation of the statement of facts.

The matter was then referred to the Minister of Justice, who recommended that an endeavor be made to obtain the consent of the Governments of Ontario and Quebec to the payment of the claim, and that should they refuse their consent to the amount being liquidated against the old Province of Canada the matter should be brought before the Exchequer Court.

On October 15th, about a month before the Haldimand election, an Order in Council was passed approving of these recommendations.

On November 9th the Order in Council was communicated to the Ontario Government.

The Attorney-General reported that it was impossible for Ontario to recognise the claim. He said:—"The Welland Canal passed to the Dominion of Canada under the B. N. A. Act, and if there was any outstanding liability of the Province arising out of the construction of the canal, such liability must be against the Dominion as a whole, and is not a liability with which the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec as now representing the Province of Canada are to be charged as for a debt of the Province of Canada.

"This was evidently the view taken by the Dominion Government until the present year, as all their inquiries and their reference to arbitrators were made without notice to this Government, or it is presumed to the Government of Quebec.

"With respect to the award, one observation suggested by reading these documents is that while the building of the canal increased very much the value of the undrowned Indian land, even this obvious and most material fact does not appear to have been taken into account in the new compensation to which the consent of the Provinces is now asked.

"If the Dominion Government as a matter of Dominion policy or of benevolence thinks fit to allow the sum of \$28,672 out of the Dominion Treasury, but not as a matter for which the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec are liable as Provinces, this Government may have nothing to say. But looking at the matter as a claim of debt, it seems to the undersigned as in the highest degree objectionable that so stale a claim should be recognised, its alleged ground having arisen upwards of half a century ago, having been the subject of an investigation and an award immediately afterwards, and, so far as appears from the statement of facts, no further claim having been suggested for some 40 years after the award, the suggestion then having come from an officer of the Dominion Government fond of antiquarian research into matters, the actors in which are dead and the facts of which had become obscure through lapse of time."

This report was communicated to the Dominion Government, and the Secretary of State subsequently informed the Lieutenant-Governor that the Government of Quebec fully concurred in the view taken by Mr. Mowat.

THE HOUSE YESTERDAY:—A great deal of work was done in yesterday's three hours' session. After a dozen private bills had been advanced a stage the House approved of the purchase of a site for Upper Canada College.

Mr. Hardy moved the second reading of the bill for the formation of new counties. A petition from the Councils of the townships desiring union, a commission of judges, a popular vote and a proclamation by the Lieutenant-Governor constitute the machinery of the bill. There was a discussion, in which the opinion was expressed that so important a bill ought not to be pushed through at so late a period of the session. The second reading, however,

was taken.

The event of the day was the second reading of the Manhood Suffrage Bill. Everybody approved of it, the debate being mainly the result of an attempt by the Opposition to share the honors of authorship. Mr. Waters' pleasure was tempered with a regret that the bill had nothing to say about widows and unmarried women. The system is superior to the American plan, in that the services of the assessors are used in making up the lists. Altogether it looks as if it will be hard to beat the Ontario franchise for cheapness, simplicity and convenience to the elector.

The Attorney-General [announced that prorogation would take place on Thursday. Morning sessions will be held, if necessary, on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Mr. Hardy's bill respecting the salaries and expenses of police magistrates, and his bill relating to the office of sheriff, and Mr. Mowat's bill relating to the solemnisation of marriages, were read the third time. The Attorney-General's bills relating to the following matters were read the second time:—Muskoka and Parry Sound, the executive administration of the laws of this Province, the protection and reformation of neglected children, the powers granted to the commissioners of Niagara Park, to amend the Partition Act, to amend the Act respecting insurance companies, to amend the law as to executions.

A MEETING of the Legal Committee was called for last evening, but was adjourned for want of a quorum.

SLAUGHTERING THE INNOCENTS:—Among the bills slaughtered yesterday by the Municipal Committee was that of Mr. Garson, proposing to abolish property qualifications in municipal elections, and also to take from municipalities the right of granting manufacturers exemption from taxation. The clauses of the bill were separately voted on, and it was noticeable that members of the committee having a considerable Labor vote in their constituencies were in favor of the abolition of such property qualification. Another bill killed was one introduced by Mr. Fell and supported by Mayor Walters, of Lindsay, proposing to divide municipalities into districts for drainage purposes. Lindsay was particularly interested in this bill, the portion of that town lying on one side of the River Saugeen requiring an entirely different system of drainage from that on the other side. It was pointed out by Mr. Waters, Mr. Phelps and the chairman that great confusion in the present law, which would require entire remodelling, would be created by the passage of such a bill, and that it could not even be considered by the committee at this late period of the session. The Voters' List Bill of Mr. Gibson, of Hamilton, and other bills met with a similar fate.