

News of the Dominion.

OUR WELLINGTON LETTER.

April 9, 1910.

Honest and Above Board.

THE purity of municipal life has suddenly dawned upon our city with light reflected from Napier, and the Council has carried a resolution of cleansing force and sweeping vigour. Here it is:—

(1) That in the opinion of this Council, paragraph (b) of section 42 of The Municipal Corporations Act, 1908, relating to the disqualification of councillors be amended so that the exception therein contained will read as follows:—“Other than as a shareholder in an incorporated company which contains more than twenty members, and is not a private company, and of which such person is not a director or general manager, or an association or partnership consisting of more than twenty members.”

(2) That, pending such alteration in the law, this Council should decline to accept any tender from any company in which a councillor is a shareholder, and which does not come within the exception above set out.

This is thorough enough not only to suggest improvement to the rest of the Dominion, but compel improvement of the Wellington practice. Every one agreed during the discussion that nobody had ever done anything wrong. Some persons had been aimed at by a certain resolution for information in the shape of returns of contracts and that sort of thing, and these persons had it out on the floor of the Council. They had very honestly and with the very best motives—one of them in a protesting speech seemed to go so far as to suggest with the motive of benefiting the Council, which could not get contractors to tender for its work above a certain volume—supplied goods to the Council, though they were not within the reach of the exceptions mentioned in the resolution. The plea was in vain. The general opinion was that these very good Councillors had done an indefensibly bad thing. The Council's interests had not suffered, it was true, but if a bad practice was continued there might not always be the same honest men to refrain from abusing it. Therefore the Council passed the resolution, with the addition of a tag forwarding the same to the Municipal Conference about to meet in a few weeks. But whatever the Conference may do, it is clear as daylight that the Wellington City Fathers will for ever set their faces against the recurrence of the history of the past, honest and above board as it has been.

There is general agreement among the citizens. But as there are always grumblers for the sake of impurity, so there are those who insist that this change must have been caused by improprieties, and these insist on knowing who were the guilty parties, and what the improprieties are of which they ought to be convicted. Here we touch the protoplasm out of which the Philistine is duly and rapidly developed.

The question of forming limited liability companies is not discussed in consequence of this business at all. Every one who knows anything about business knows that in an ordinary private firm, death of a partner stops the business, and that at any time the permeability of one partner may make irreparable trouble, especially in family partnerships, which are, as every one knows, the most liable to disturbance from the personal equation. At the same time, no one wants anything else but the rule laid down by the motion. If there are only certain firms that can supply the city requirements adequately, there is no reason for their principals to either refrain from forming the ordinary limited liability company or to keep out of the Council. By their own showing they will, by staying out and supplying their indispensable goods of good quality and cheap rates, do more good to the city than by entering in and breaking the spirit of the city rules.

The City Purse.

The Mayor made a review of the city financial position at this meeting of the Council which has greatly pleased his

friends. These have always held that Dr. Newman is a very able exponent of public affairs. This speech reminds them how the steadily working Doctor used to do his Parliamentary work—how careful he was always, and how full of detail; he did not forget to point out that his grip of the city finances has justified all they have ever said about the standing of their champion, and they are in proportion grieved at his persistent refusal to remain in the Mayoralty. It was a very practical statement, and it made the most of some very good figures embodying exceptional results. The city has paid its way, and been economical during the year. It has successfully established a system of accident insurance “on its own”; the tramway figure has reached the unprecedented figure of £39,400, with a net profit of over £6,000, and is paying for some necessary extensions; the electric lighting has distinguished itself by the patriotic feat of introducing a metal filament light which has diminished the revenue considerably by giving the citizens more light for less money, making them a present of £3400 on the year's working, which money, said the Mayor, remains in the pockets of the citizens; the city has watered and made clean and sweet the highlying suburb of Northlands and Wadestown, at a cost of only £20,000, and is doubling the supply of water from the Wainui-o-mata; lastly, the rents and rates are coming in fairly without unusual delays. On the whole, the citizens have reason to be proud of the financial position and of the capable manner in which it was put before them by the Mayor.

The Mayoral Contest.

The contest for the Mayoralty has produced a promise from Mr. Wilford that in case of election he will resign the Chairmanship of Committees. There will be, therefore, grief in political circles, where the ability and impartiality of Mr. Wilford's reign in the Committee chair is well understood and highly appreciated, as something that has not been seen in that place for many years. The ambition from which Mr. Wilford suffers is acknowledged to be highly honourable, of course, and everybody wishes him well. At the same time, his political friends of both sides (for both sides appreciate Mr. Wilford in the chair) object to any interference with his political usefulness. He is showing remarkable knowledge of the city's affairs, and why not, seeing that he has fought—and lost—four Mayoral elections. His chairman introduced him the other night as a lineal descendant of Robert Bruce and the Spiler. Whereat the audience laughed. The British public always likes a “game un,” who comes up smiling, no matter how often he may be knocked down.

On the Money Market.

The success of the loan has been misunderstood for a time, as there are people inclined to regard the account as referring to some of the business loans authorised under the legislation of last year. But the Premier has removed that impression. Considering all things, the subscription by the public of 80 per cent. of the loan is very good. The underwriters are for the moment left with the balance, but they will in all probability get that off without much delay. At any rate, they are satisfied, and that settles the matter. Our finance is secure, anyhow. We cannot, of course, conceal from ourselves the fact that it would have been better if we had met with an oversubscription—if, in other words, the loan had been rushed. But as we were by no means alone in the market, the result is not to be regarded as anything but satisfactory.

Railway Revenue.

Mr. Millar's announcement in Australia of the large excess of a quarter of a million in the railway revenue, is a sterling piece of news, which has rejoiced the hearts of the party. In the face of the agitation for the formation of a Northern railway league for the division of the railway spoil every year, something of the sort was necessary. The Minister of Public Works has given a fair reply to the demand, showing (1) that the best Southern railway vote was largely representative of past events

and (2) that the Northern road vote last year was very much larger than the Southern.

The published railway figures show a great preponderance of profit for the Northern divisions, the net revenue being £416 per mile in the North, against £314 for the South. This, on the capital account of each, works out at 3.82 per cent, against 3.06. In figures (this is the case from the Opposition point of view) the measurement is a profit after paying all expenses, including interest, of £10,000, against a loss of £82,000. The last four-weekly period of the year is not included, but the difference cannot be affected substantially between the railway sections of the two islands. The North has cause to rejoice that the time has arrived when the superior resources on this side of the Strait are making themselves felt. This is a fine contrast to the earlier years of the system when the profit of the Southern sections was so much larger. That, however, was owing to the more rapid developing of the South from obvious causes. There is, moreover, nothing in the North to match the white elephant of the Otago Central. It is added in some quarters that neither is there a white elephant like the Midland with its tremendous tunnel, of which it is said that the construction will reflect more credit on the constructing engineers than on the managers, who will take over the work in due time. Of these works, it is not necessary to enter into a detailed defence. Sufficient, for the purpose of the discussion between the rival claims of North and South, is it to point out that for neither of these works can the regime in power since 1891 be said to be responsible. The Dominion was committed to them by former administrations. The Liberal Government had to do the best it could with the legacy to which it had fallen heir. As a counterfoil, the South used to hold that there was another white elephant in the shape of the Northern Trunk line. But that line is proving itself something very different; and it must be confessed that the Liberal Government finished that line with some energy, and in the end much concentration. There was a railway league in that case, it must also be confessed.

The P. and O.

The Auckland agitation in re the steamers of the P. & O. is not resented here. But it is scarcely to be regarded as favoured. The question uppermost

in many minds is, “why should everybody have to go to the end of the island to embark?” Many people prefer the idea of not having to take train or steamer to Auckland for the purpose when it would be so easy for the P. & O. boat to call at Wellington on an alternate scheme. The matter, however, has not a very serious interest as yet for any one.

The Powelka Hunt.

Powelka, who walked out of an open door, has been keeping the country lively ever since by walking into a close bush. The state of tension it would be impossible to adequately describe. But the country is thoroughly roused, the police are out, and shots have been exchanged. The end is bound to come soon. We can, at all events, congratulate ourselves that this is not a country, in which the road agent has any friends.

Nothing Succeeds Like Conciliation.

Mr. Millar has told the Australians that we have discovered here, apropos of the strike question, that nothing succeeds like conciliation. His point is that the new system has made conciliation really conciliate; that, in other words, we have returned to the original idea underlying the compulsory Arbitration Act: that we are keeping the compulsory principle in the background for emergencies. If the Australians are reasonable they will see that at all events this country, if not to be branded absolutely as a land without strikes, is on the high road to become so—partly by the sort of conciliation which relies for every case on the expert knowledge of both sides in that case, and partly on the compulsory principle, which leaves the irreducible minimum of unreason to be dealt with by the Court. Arbitration is going to win through after all. Already the judge of the Arbitration Court, which once never got free of its work, now continues to give much of his time to the Supreme Court work. Of course, we want common sense every time, and it is on the cards that the new system inaugurated in 1908 will get it for us every time. When everybody recognises that everybody cannot get everything he wants under the system, the system will assert itself in the way originally intended for it. And that is the approach of a great triumph after all.

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