

(November 30, 1908.)

Some Suggestions as to Toronto Street Railway Problems.

BY CONTROLLER F. S. SPENCE.

ADDRESSING the Canadian Club on "Some Suggestions as to Toronto's Street Railway Problems," Controller F. S. Spence said:

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,—As you know the subject upon which I am billed to speak to you to-day was not of my selection. Had I been making the choice it occurs to me that something might have been selected rather more entertaining and less contentious. I do not propose to solve the intricate problems which present themselves. All I can do is to state these problems, from the viewpoint of the city and the citizens—and they are but the opinions of one upon a matter in which opinions vary very largely.

There are many problems and they vary in importance. It would take all the afternoon to give in detail all the grievances that the citizens have to submit to at the hands of that arbitrary despot who rules us from the corner of Church and King streets.

There are, however, three major problems upon which I would touch. Let me enumerate them briefly:—1. The problem of new lines and extensions; 2. the problem of overcrowding, and 3. the problem of radial railway service into the town, instead of outside of the city limits.

In approaching these problems we are confronted immediately with one general first difficulty. In my opinion the public hostility shown towards the Street Railway Company, though not without reason, is a condition that constitutes a serious difficulty in the matter of dealing with the company. There is a general bitterness, a hostility, the spirit of Flemingphobia. To deal successfully with street railway problems we must approach them in an independent and judicial manner. We are none of us, perhaps, innocent in this connection, but the newspapers and the public men are in an unfortunate situation.

The real cause of nearly all the present dissatisfaction was lack of vision in the days gone by. Mr. Spence quoted figures showing the remarkable development that had taken place in the company's operations and patronage since 1892—a development which apparently none of the city's representatives had foreseen. The track development, he continued, has not kept pace with this growth. The revenue has been far in excess of what was anticipated. The city arranged for a percentage of receipts on this basis: Eight per cent. of the first million of receipts; ten per cent. of the next half million; twelve per cent. of the next half million; fifteen per cent. of the next one million, and twenty per cent. of all receipts above three millions. We did not look far enough ahead. We have long been past the three million mark. We are confronted with congestion on our tracks and overcrowding in our cars.

Compared with other cities of similar size the track mileage in Toronto is surprisingly inadequate. I have here the figures for 1901, the last year for which reliable figures were available. With your permission I will read them. Buffalo had 195 miles; Pittsburg, 172; San Francisco, 251; Detroit, 156; Milwaukee, 114; Cincinnati, 208; New Orleans, 276; and Washington, 208, while Toronto had only 99 miles, and the addition since 1901 has only been eight miles. And yet Toronto, more than any other city, because of the way in which its population is spread out, needs car lines.

This, then, is probably the first problem—the lack of sufficient lines. Under the city's understanding it controlled the situation. The engineer recommended the routes to the Council and if the Council approved the company must lay them. But the Privy Council has held otherwise and we find that the city cannot compel the company to lay tracks upon any street.

What is the present situation? The company wants to lay lines on certain streets. The city wants extensions and won't consider other propositions until these are dealt with. A deadlock has accordingly arisen and the whole inconvenience falls back upon the citizens.

My own personal view is that the city and the company ought to agree, and there ought to be more acceptance on the part of each of what the other wanted. They ought to agree upon what lines in the central part of the city were absolutely necessary, and the city ought to consent to the company getting those tracks on condition that the company agreed to the extensions needed outside and to a sufficient number of cars.

Then the city would be in a position to rest its case and to go to the Legislature with its claims.

The second problem of overcrowding really arises out of the first. It is claimed there are not sufficient cars; it is alleged, in answer, you can't put more cars on the existing lines without blockading them. With regard to the overcrowding of the cars I must point out frankly that the city is not altogether blameless in having allowed the company to carry fifty per cent. more passengers in a car than there was seating accommodation for. We got congestion by our own agreement. We insisted upon cheap tickets in limited hours. Have you ever thought of the fact that there are eight different street car fares in the city. There is the five-cent fare, the ten-cent night fare, the three-cent children's fare; there are tickets at 25 for the dollar, blue tickets at six for a quarter, red tickets at eight for a quarter, white tickets at seven for a quarter and children's tickets at ten for a quarter. The result is that no man who has not a lot of change at his disposal can equip himself at once with a supply of yellow, red, white and children's tickets. A citizen to ride cheaply must invest \$1.75 in tickets. The working man cannot always do that, and it is the working man who consequently suffers.

The city's share of the fares collected from the people are applied to the cutting down of the tax rates. What does this mean? Simply that we are making the shop girls and the factory hands, who have to use the cars, pay—through the car fare boxes—the taxes of the Gas Company, the Grand Trunk Railway and other big corporations. I would like to see an actuary employed to determine how much of a reduction would occur in our percentage by establishing the red ticket basis throughout, all day long, thus equalizing the congestion. In my view we ought to cut down the traffic to the red ticket basis, and have eight tickets for twenty-five cents all day long and for everybody.

Now, then, a moment for the radial railways. The manifest solution of the radial railway problem is to have the radial cars run right into the heart of the city. There ought to be found some common ground of agreement between the city and the company in that regard. Why could there not be devised a plan whereby the radials would be assured that when the Toronto Street Railway Company's franchise expires twelve years hence, they would either be paid for their property on a surrender, or they would be allowed to continue on certain terms that might be fore-shadowed now? Now I

don't say that is quite clear, but it would be well worth while for us to go about devising some line of policy. Probably the central terminal could be located at the St. Lawrence market, the biggest monument to municipal mismanagement in Toronto. It was built to be a great market free to the farmers. It has been turned into a show place.

One thing more and I have done. What is to be done twelve years hence when the franchise of the Street Railway Company terminates? I have only one opinion. To take over the railway and to own and operate it as a public utility by the City of Toronto. There are five strong reasons for this course.

First: the absolute impossibility of compelling any corporation to live up to its obligations.

Second: The greatest difficulty in the way of good civic government the indifference of the best citizens. The apathy of the best citizens is the curse of municipal government. If larger interests were at stake it would be easier to secure the services of big men. In this way I believe that public ownership would raise the character and tone of the City Council.

Third: A municipal corporation is besieged by the efforts of private corporations to obtain franchises and control the operation of them when secured. If municipalities owned their large franchises there would be no reason for the boddler in city councils.

Fourth: The city highways ought to be controlled by the City Council. The streets belong to the city.

The fifth is a moral reason. There is a social cohesiveness in the co-operation of a community with a common object for the common good. When the man is working for the community he is working for himself. It is thus we attain the ideal. Ours becomes a better city. Ours is a truer Christianity.
