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The Failure of Municipal Reform, 1906-1919

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The Halifax Board of Control: The Failure of Municipal Reform, 1906-1919

THE RAPID GROWTH OF CITIES in the early part of this century, while symptomatic of a great economic boom, created considerable social problems. In this context, civic reform movements made great strides in the cities of North America, and these movements have received growing attention from Canadian historians.[1] Civic reform in Halifax has not received the attention devoted to other cities, yet the residents of Halifax grappled with many of the characteristic problems of urban growth in the early 20th century, including problems of transportation and services and the creation of a pleasant urban environment. Interestingly, they also engaged in a short-lived experiment in the reform of civic government, and the rise and fall of board of control government in Halifax offers some useful insights into the process of urban reform in this city.

The growth of Halifax in the early years of the 20th century was primarily due to the city's role as a major port for the shipment of Canadian staple exports. In the decade after 1901, the city's population grew from 40,832 to 46,619, an increase of 14.2 per cent; by comparison, Saint John, Halifax's rival as a year-round Atlantic port, gained population at a rate of only 5 per cent.[2] The construction of massive new port facilities in the south end of the city between 1913 and 1919 strengthened Halifax's new pre-eminence on the Atlantic coast. Yet because the city served as a port and not as a manufacturing centre, the city's expansion had remained a "spin-off" of economic growth elsewhere.[3] This failure to develop an industrial base reinforced the caution with which the civic govern-

1 See, for example, John C. Weaver, *Shaping the Canadian City: Essays in Urban Politics and Policy* (Kingston, 1977); Alan F.J. Artibise and Gilbert A. Stelter, eds., *The Usable Urban Past* (Toronto 1979); Paul Rutherford, ed., *Saving the Canadian City, 1880-1920: An Anthology of Early Articles on Urban Reform* (Toronto, 1974); M. Baker, "The Politics of Municipal Reform in St. John's, Newfoundland, 1888-1892", *Urban History Review*, 5 (1976), pp. 12-29; H.V. Nelles and C. Armstrong, "The Great Fight for Clean Government", *Urban History Review*, 5 (1976), pp. 50-66; John C. Weaver, "Elitism and the Corporate Ideal: Businessmen and Boosters in Canadian Civic Reform, 1890-1920", in A.R. McCormack and I. MacPherson, eds., *Cities in the West* (Ottawa 1975), pp. 48-73. D.A. Sutherland's "*Warden of the North* Revisited: A Re-Examination of Thomas Raddall's Assessment of Nineteenth-Century Halifax", *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, ser. IV, XIX (1981), pp. 81-91, provides an historiographical overview of writing upon Halifax.

2 For the Halifax figures see D.A. Sutherland, "The Personnel and Policies of the Halifax Board of Trade, 1890-1914", in L.R. Fischer and E.W. Sager, eds., *The Enterprising Canadians* (St. John's 1979), p. 220, fn. 44. The population of Saint John was 40,711 in 1901 and 42,511 in 1911: R. Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada, 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed* (Toronto 1974), p. 99.

3 Sutherland, "The Halifax Board of Trade", pp. 216-17.

ment approached budgetary questions; expenditures underwent extremely close scrutiny and there was often much argument about the proper method of civic assessment. Problems of civic revenue were complicated by the presence within the city of large amounts of untaxed military property, whose status served as a perpetual source of resentment between the city and the Crown.[4] Faced with such problems, reformers who wished to create a more attractive city not only hoped to remedy existing problems in the urban environment but also sought to establish favourable conditions for industrial development, which would, directly or indirectly, broaden the tax base.

Organizations to improve the quality of urban life had become fairly common in North America when such a group, the Civic Improvement League, was formed in Halifax in 1906. The League devoted itself, in its early days, to the encouragement of "beautification" and the elimination of "nuisances". The organization began as a committee of the Board of Trade and maintained an office in the Board of Trade building.[5] There is nothing in the League's early records to indicate that the members were thinking about reform of civic government. Yet the major figure in the League, R.M. Hattie, a journalist, eventually became an indefatigable publicist for civic reform, played an active role in the campaign to establish the board of control, and entered civic politics as an alderman in 1912. A paper he presented to the Civic Improvement League in January 1913, four months before the inception of the board of control, presented the full-blown civic gospel and indicated how far the Civic Improvement League had moved since 1906. Entitled "A Comprehensive Plan: The First Step in Civic Improvement", Hattie explained, with many references to expert opinion, the importance and necessity of planning, carried out by a staff of professionals.[6]

While the Civic Improvement League was moving towards a more comprehensive approach to civic questions, the Board of Trade, its creator, was also affected by the movement for civic reform in Canada. Elsewhere progressive businessmen and professionals had succeeded in changing the structure of civic government in many Canadian cities, beginning with Toronto in 1896.[7] The purpose of such changes generally was to place power in the hands of an executive

4 R.V. Harris, "Exempted Government Properties in Canadian Cities and Towns", *The Canadian Municipal Journal*, VIII (1912), pp. 405-7. A copy of this article is in the R.V. Harris Collection, Vol. 358, MG1, Public Archives of Nova Scotia [PANS].

5 *Fortieth Annual Report of the Halifax Board of Trade* (Halifax, 1906), p. 22.

6 R.M. Hattie, *A Comprehensive Plan: The First Step in Civic Improvement* [1913] Vertical File, Vol. 114, #3, PANS.

7 Weaver, *Shaping the Canadian City*, p. 52. See also W.B. Munro, "Boards of Control and Commission Government in Canadian Cities", Canadian Political Science Association *Proceedings*, 1 (1913), pp. 112-23. Boards of Control were subsequently established in Ottawa (1907), Hamilton (1910), London (1914) as well as in Winnipeg (1906), Calgary (1908) and Montreal (1909): Weaver, "Elitism and the Corporate Ideal", p. 52. Professor Weaver does not mention the board of control in Halifax.

more isolated from public pressure than were the aldermen elected by individual wards. Reformers felt that cities suffered from the inability of ward politicians to take account of city-wide considerations and so form rational plans for development. Whether the form of government advocated was the board of control, a small group elected on a city-wide basis superimposed upon an emasculated council, or the more radical system called the commission, which functioned without a council at all, the purpose was the same. It was to enable paid civic officials to administer the castor oil of efficiency, planning and expertise even if these proved to be unpalatable to one portion or other of the citizenry. Commission government was developed in Texas, and in this field as in many others, Canadians were generally unwilling to accept radical American ideas without dilution.[8] The board of control, which, according to W.B. Munro, originated in New York City, provided an appropriate compromise; by superimposing a strong executive upon a weakened council, it seemed to provide the best of the old and the new.[9]

The involvement of the Halifax Board of Trade with civic reform began in March 1910 with the creation of a special committee on civic administration chaired by a former mayor, the prominent lawyer R.T. McIllreith. This nine-man committee included a number of important businessmen.[10] The following month it met with a special committee of aldermen appointed by the city council "to enquire into the system of Municipal Government in other Cities in Canada and the United States where they are governed by a Board of Control or Commission and report to this Council at an early date as to the advisability of adopting a similar method in this City".[11] The city council committee consisted of men of similar backgrounds to that of the committee established by the Board of

8 See Weaver, "Elitism and the Corporate Ideal", pp. 61, 67-72, for a good treatment of the matters discussed in this paragraph. A different form of commission government was established in St. John's, Newfoundland. See Melvin Baker, "William Gilbert Gosling and the Establishment of Commission Government in St. John's, Newfoundland, 1914", *Urban History Review*, 9 (1980-81), pp. 35-51.

9 Munro, "Boards of Control and Commission Government", pp. 115-6. See also Munro, *American Influences on Canadian Government* (Toronto 1929) p. 109. Munro's view is questioned in T.J. Scanlon, "Board of Control: Its Merits and Defects", *Canadian Public Administration*, 3 (1960), p. 332.

10 *Forty-fifth Annual Report, Halifax Board of Trade* (Halifax, 1910), p. 22. The members of the Board of Trade special committee were: R.T. McIlreith, barrister, of McIlreith and Tremaine; D. Macgillivray, manager, Halifax branch of the Canadian Bank of Commerce; R.G. Beazley, Beazley Bros., contractors; Michael Dwyer, John Tobin & Co., wholesale grocer; Andrew MacKinlay, A & W. MacKinlay, bookseller and stationer; Walter Mitchell, W. and C.H. Mitchell, Comm. & West India merchants; J.D. O'Connor, the Britannia Manufacturing Co.; W.R. Scriven, J.J. Scriven, baker; O.E. Smith, J.E. Morse, tea merchant.

11 *Minutes of the Halifax City Council* (microfilm), 14 March 1910, p. 203, Reel 12, RG 35-102 (1), PANS. The members of the city council committee were: I.B. Shaffner (ward 1), I.B. Shaffner & Co., flour dealers and brokers; F.P. Bligh (ward 2), barrister; N.B. Smith (ward 3), Smith and Proctor, butter and cheese dealers; A. Hubley (ward 4), realtor; A.A. Thompson (ward 5), druggist; John Rankine (ward 6), physician.

Trade. Four of the six members were businessmen, two of them leaders in the business community, while the fifth was a lawyer and the sixth a physician. Nevertheless, the city council committee was much more lukewarm on the question of a change in civic government than that of the Board of Trade, and asked for more time to investigate the question.[12]

Ten months passed before the city council committee reported in February 1911. By then two of the aldermen appointed to it were no longer on the council, and a third failed to attend the meeting which brought in a report. At this three-man meeting, two aldermen approved a "majority" report recommending minor changes, such as a reduction in the number of aldermen, the election of some aldermen by the city at large and a simplification of the existing council committee system. This report opposed the introduction of either a board of control or a commission, and was signed by F.P. Bligh, a lawyer who became mayor in 1912, and John Rankine, a north-end physician.[13] A minority report was submitted by Andrew Hubley, a realtor, who had served as the committee's chairman. Hubley did not specify whether he preferred a board of control or a commission, but concluded that "the time for a change has arrived when the business of the city should be done in a business-like manner by a small executive body responsible to the people of the whole city".[14]

Shortly afterwards the Board of Trade's committee on civic administration produced a resolution affirming their continuing commitment to civic reform by either the introduction of board of control or commission government. The committee demanded that the question be "submitted to a vote of the ratepayers...at the time of the civic elections in April next..."; the resolution explicitly placed the blame for the hiatus of nearly a year not on lack of interest at the Board of Trade, but upon the inactivity of the city council committee.[15] In 1911 the Board of Trade redoubled its efforts to bring about change. The board's new president, Michael Dwyer, was a strong supporter of municipal reform.[16] In addition, both R.M. Hattie, the moving force behind the Civic Improvement League, and Reginald V. Harris, a young lawyer, had become active Board of Trade members.

Among reformers in Halifax Harris deserves special mention as he was the most important figure in the establishment of the board of control in Halifax.[17]

12 E.A. Saunders to Joseph Chisholm, 3 March 1911, #49, Box 10 (1911), RG 35-102 (1B), PANS.

13 "Report of the Special Committee on Municipal Government", 7 February 1911, #44, Box 10 (1911), RG 35-102 (1B), PANS.

14 Minority report submitted by Alderman Andrew Hubley, 14 March 1911, *ibid.*

15 E.A. Saunders to Joseph Chisholm, 9 February 1911, including resolution signed by R.T. McIlreith and others on behalf of the Board of Trade special committee on civic administration: #49, Box 10 (1911), RG 35-102 (1B), PANS.

16 *Minutes of the Halifax Board of Trade*, 21 March 1911, p. 80, PANS.

17 For an outline of his career and many activities, see "Dr. Reginald V. Harris", #55, Vol. 608, MG 20, PANS. See also the R.V. Harris Collection, Vols. 337-390, MG 1, PANS.

He was young, energetic, and had a profound belief in progress. Although a native Nova Scotian, he briefly practised law in Winnipeg for two years, a city where the board of control was introduced in the year of his arrival there in 1906.[18] Upon returning to Halifax, he devoted his energies to propagating the gospel of uplift and reform. He began producing in July 1910 a series of columns in the *Herald* and *Mail* (published under a pseudonym) entitled "Halifax Uplift"; the objective was to make Halifax "Bigger, Better and More Beautiful". The column ran to more than 160 numbers, and encompassed every aspect of the urban reform movement, served up with relentless doses of boosterism. Harris not only produced columns on commission government, but also devoted individual columns to the board of control as it operated in Toronto, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Hamilton and Montreal, contrasting throughout the inadequacies of older civic systems with the virtues of the new.[19]

Harris provides the link between the work of such organizations as the Civic Improvement League and the Board of Trade, and indeed, combined within himself many of the attributes that were characteristic of the whole civic reform movement before the First World War. The son of an Anglican clergyman, and a future Chancellor of the Diocese of Nova Scotia, Harris was strongly motivated by his belief that the betterment of society was a fundamental Christian duty. He believed in efficiency, in applying the methods of business to civic administration, and the implementation of policy by experts. Harris certainly would have agreed with the eminent Canadian political scientist, W.B. Munro, when he asserted in 1913: "Most men will agree with you, for example, when you assert that the work of conducting a city's affairs is *business*, not *government*".[20]

Those who supported civic reform tended to be younger men with a professional training who had not been closely involved with the older system of civic government, though it is easy to find exceptions to this generalization. However, the supporters and opponents of civic reform in Halifax cannot be categorized on the basis of class, ethnic, political, occupational or religious lines. Those wanting reform were impatient with the squabbling that on occasion disfigured the debates of the 18 unpaid aldermen who comprised the city council. Although the existing order was not corrupt, it was difficult even for its supporters to argue that it was efficient. Day-to-day business was delegated to a plethora of standing committees, which seemed to reformers incapable of implementing substantial changes. The business community in particular was frustrated by the council's seeming inability to alter the system of municipal taxation, to attract

18 *Who's Who and Why, 1912*, pp. 277-8. For the board of control in Winnipeg, see Alan F.J. Artibise, *Winnipeg: a Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914* (Montreal and London, 1975).

19 "Halifax Uplift" [scrapbook of cuttings], July 1910-May 1911, Harris Papers, Vol. 373, MG 1, PANS. Harris compiled a detailed index to this scrapbook. It is not clear whether he wrote all the columns; he certainly seems to have been the guiding hand behind their production.

20 Munro, "Boards of Control and Commission Government in Canadian Cities", p. 112.

industry to Halifax, to make satisfactory agreements with the public utility companies, indeed to do those things that would help to place Halifax in the stream of progress in a progressive age. Faster growing cities, such as Toronto in 1896, Winnipeg in 1906 and Montreal in 1909, had opted for the board of control;[21] Halifax's arch-rival, Saint John, had gone further and voted in 1911 to establish a commission.[22] Supporters of change believed that Halifax was being left behind, a fear regularly encouraged in Harris' "Uplift" columns.

Those who opposed change tended to have served as aldermen or to have held the office of mayor, and were therefore apparently comfortable with the existing system. Before the 1911 aldermanic elections, the council was strongly opposed to changing the structure of civic government; this view was reflected in the majority report of the council's committee of inquiry in February 1911. However, in the 1911 and 1912 elections, R.V. Harris, R.M. Hattie, H.E. Gates, a young architect, and William Dennis, the publisher of the *Herald* and *Mail* newspapers, were elected to the council as novice aldermen, along with other supporters of civic reform.[23] This created a council almost evenly split between those who wanted structural change and those who opposed it.

The council in 1910 had consisted of an impressive cross-section of the business and professional community; most, if not all, were prosperous, and a few were wealthy.[24] The council in 1912 consisted of a similar cross-section, but was much more strongly supportive of reform. The decisive factor seems to have been age, and the related element of familiarity with the old system. Two representative opponents of change were Alfred Whitman, a Conservative lawyer from the south end and A.C. Hawkins, a north-end physician and prom-

21 Appendix to minority report submitted by Alderman Andrew Hubley, 14 March 1911, #44, Box 10 (1911), RG 35-102 (1B) PANS. See also W.D. Lighthall, "The Board of Control in Montreal", Canadian Political Science Association *Proceedings*, 1 (1913), pp. 136-9.

22 Nelles and Armstrong, "The Great Fight", p. 54; T.D. Walker, "Commission Government in St. John", Canadian Political Science Association *Proceedings*, 1 (1913), pp. 139-43.

23 R.V. Harris, H.E. Gates, J.L. Connolly, of J.L. Connolly stationer and engraver, M.S. Clarke, realtor and auctioneer, and M. Scanlan, Jr., of Scanlan and Son, dry goods, were elected in 1911; R.M. Hattie and William Dennis were elected in 1912. All were supporters of the board of control. It is worth noting here that under the City Charter (1907), one-third of the aldermen (six of 18) came up for election each year, to be elected for a three-year term. British subjects (including unmarried women and widows) assessed city rates were entitled to vote: *Halifax City Charter, 1907*, s. 31.

24 Seven of the 18 members of the 1910 council appeared in *Who's Who and Why* between 1910 and 1914. They were: S.Y. Wilson, of A. Wilson and Son, wholesale and retail fish (ward 1); Alfred Whitman, barrister (ward 1); N.B. Smith, of N.B. Smith, butter and cheese dealer, (ward 3); J.B. Douglas, of A. Fordham & Co., leather goods (ward 3); C.R. Hoben, of C.R. Hoben & Co., plumbing and kitchenware (ward 4); P.F. Martin, of Martin and Moore, painting contractors (ward 5). Among other members of the 1910 council were W.E. Hebb, insurance broker (ward 2); J.R. Corston, physician (ward 5); G.A. MacKenzie, manager of the Acadia Sugar Refinery (ward 6). Candidates for election as aldermen had to be worth $3,000; only males were eligible: *Halifax City Charter, 1907*, s. 15.

inent Liberal.[25] Both vocally opposed the introduction of the board of control. What they had in common was their extensive experience as aldermen.

For their part, the Board of Trade, under the presidency of Michael Dwyer, had no intention of accepting the city council committee's report shelving municipal reform. On 3 March 1911 E.A. Saunders, secretary of the Board, wrote to the mayor, Joseph Chisholm, asking that the council agree to a plebiscite on the question of civic government.[26] Whether by accident or design, Board of Trade pressure coincided with a most successful "uplift revival week" which began on 6 March. This event had been organized the previous month at a meeting chaired by the Rev. R.B. Ross, president of the Civic Improvement League, and attended by W.S. Davidson, vice-president of the Board of Trade, R.V. Harris, R.M. Hattie, Mrs. William Dennis, Marshall Saunders, an important figure in charity work and the author of *Beautiful Joe*, as well as a number of other representatives of middle-class groups.[27] The labour movement does not appear to have played a role in the uplift campaign, or in the movement to establish a board of control.

The preparations for the uplift revival received much publicity in both the *Chronicle-Echo* and *Herald-Mail* newspapers, which, unusually enough, united forces behind it. When the revival week arrived, much excitement had been generated and an ambitious programme of meetings organized. They were held every day in all parts of the city on all manner of civic subjects. A wide range of organizations, from the Victoria College of Art to charity societies, took part.[28] Religious denominations also participated in the campaign, which, as the *Chronicle* put it "has to do with social service, which is becoming more and more recognized as an important part of Christian service".[29] The civic evangelist, R.W. Sewall, whose claim to fame lay in his organization of an uplift programme in Boston called "Boston-1915", appears to have been an astute publicist, who in his many performances avoided concrete analysis in favour of lofty generalizations about progress, cooperation and self-help; his remarks were invariably interlarded with uplifting anecdotes drawn from the American urban experience. All of this activity received glowing coverage in the press, which contributed to the euphoria by publishing articles with titles such as "What Civic Revival Did For Houston".[30]

On 11 March the newspapers announced that the Board of Trade council had

25 For Whitman's career, see *Who's Who and Why, 1914*, p. 958. Whitman served on council from 1907 to 1913. For Hawkins, see Henry Roper, "The Strange Political Career of A.C. Hawkins, Mayor of Halifax 1918-1919", *Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society Collections*, 41 (1982), pp. 141-63.

26 E.A. Saunders to Joseph Chisholm, 3 March 1911, #49, Box 10 (1911), RG 35-102 (1B), PANS.

27 *Halifax Herald*, 17 February 1911.

28 *Morning Chronicle* (Halifax), 6 March 1911.

29 *Chronicle*, 3 March 1911.

30 *Chronicle*, 4 March 1911.

approved a draft bill, to be introduced in the Legislature, which would, if enacted, establish a board of control in Halifax.[31] This was the first indication that the Board of Trade had committed itself to a board of control as its vehicle for civic reform. The proposed bill provided for the holding of a plebiscite in April asking the ratepayers to decide whether it should be implemented. This rather dramatic, indeed audacious, mode of proceeding provided a fitting climax to one of Halifax's rare orgies of civic breast-beating.

At a special meeting three days later, the city council debated the Board of Trade resolution. After a heated, often acrimonious discussion, the council refused to support the bill "as proposed by the Board of Trade" by a vote of 11 to 4. The council did, however, agree to request a plebiscite on the following two questions: "Are you in favour of the reduction of the number of Alderman from eighteen to twelve? Are you in favour of a board of control elected by the people?"[32] Despite the city council's refusal to cooperate, the Board of Trade proceeded with its bill. In a letter published in the *Mail* on 24 March, R.V. Harris, under the *nom de plume* "Ratepayer", argued that the plebiscite should be held after legislative approval was received: "the people should have before them when they vote a few weeks hence some such concrete scheme as as been so carefully worked out by the Board of Trade".[33] Although the Legislature did not accept this reasoning, it did pass enabling legislation for the plebiscite as asked for by the city council; after a month of furious public debate, and no doubt in the still-warm glow of the uplift revival, the ratepayers voted in favour of both questions on 26 April 1911.[34]

It is significant that only about a third of the total number of ratepayers voted on the questions, and, except in the three wards in which there were aldermanic contests, few bothered to vote at all.[35] Nevertheless, in every ward, there was a decisive majority in favour of change. The enthusiasts ignored the light turnout, and emphasized the magnitude of their victory on both questions. Their opponents, led by Alderman Alfred Whitman, argued that the proposed change was unnecessary and that plebiscites were a misleading indicator of public opinion. According to Whitman, plebiscites were "sought at the instance of persons who are seeking a departure from normal or existing conditions and unless the popular vote evinces a strong demand for the change, it should clearly not be made. Abstention in such a case is evidence that the abstainers are satis-

31 *Chronicle*, 11 March 1911.

32 *Minutes of the Halifax City Council*, 14 March 1911, pp. 433-6, Reel 12, RG 35-102 (1), PANS.

33 *Evening Mail* (Halifax), 24 March 1911. A cutting of this article is in the Harris scrapbook on the board of control controversy and is initialled RVH: Vol. 358, MG 1, PANS.

34 *Chronicle*, 27 April 1911, *Debates of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly, 1911*, p. 166. David MacPherson (Halifax) moved second reading and expressed a number of prescient reservations about the introduction of a board of control. He was a former mayor (1889-92, 1895-6).

35 For the official returns on both questions, see *Minutes of the Halifax City Council*, 28 April 1911, (microfilm), Reel 12, RG 35-102 (1), PANS.

fied or at least not dissatisfied with things as they are, and consequently every vote not cast should be counted in the negative".[36] Despite the shift in the balance of forces which had occurred in the April 1911 election, Whitman had considerable support on the city council. After protracted delay, the council considered a motion on 12 October 1911, put by the newly-elected alderman R.V. Harris, that six aldermen be named to a joint committee with the Board of Trade, to which an additional six ratepayers would be co-opted, for the purpose of drafting a bill. The motion lost by a vote of nine to seven.[37] The obduracy of the aldermen was attacked by all the major newspapers; they were accused of being reactionary, of flouting the popular will, of protecting their own positions. The *Echo* trumpeted:

> Instead of reform from within the change must be effected from without. It is now up to the Board of Trade to complete the committee off its own bat, proceed with drawing up of the new Charter and ensure its passage at the next session of the Provincial Parliament. The lordly City Council will have to drink the hemlock whether it wills it or no.[38]

The council again considered Harris' motion on 9 November, and, after a debate distinguished by procedural manoeuvering, the motion was again lost 10 to 9, on the tie-breaking vote of Mayor Joseph Chisholm.[39]

The council's resistance led the Board of Trade committee, consisting of six prominent businessmen, A.M. Bell, George E. Faulkner, W.S. Davidson, O.E. Smith, W.A. Black and Michael Dwyer, to co-opt six aldermen to serve in place of those the council refused to appoint. As O.E. Smith put it, "'a change in the form of civic government and taxation has got to come. Our present system is antiquated. We have got to get it down to a business basis....These aldermen are apparently opposed to everything which is along the line of progress".[40] Although debate continued through the winter and spring of 1912 as the Board of Trade's bill proceeded through the Legislature, fundamental positions remained the same. Board of control supporters argued that it was business-like, progressive and efficient; the establishment of a paid executive would make possible the many changes that were needed to create a better city, and that the principal obstacle to change, the aldermen, would be limited in their ability to obstruct. Those opposed maintained that the change would encourage waste, and that the stipend of the controllers, $1,000 a year, would not attract first-

36 *Chronicle*, 15 April 1911.

37 *Minutes of the Halifax City Council*, 12 October 1911, p. 93, (microfilm) Reel 12, RG 35-102 (1), PANS.

38 *Daily Echo* (Halifax), 14 October 1911.

39 *Minutes of the Halifax City Council*, 9 November 1911, pp. 96-100, (microfilm), Reel 12, RG 35-102 (1), PANS.

40 *Mail*, 14 October 1911.

class administrators, but second-raters in it for the money. These objections were put forward by prominent municipal politicians such as Joseph Chisholm, F.P. Bligh, A.C. Hawkins and Peter Martin. Nevertheless, the bill was passed by the Legislature in May 1912, though it was not proclaimed until 1 April 1913.[41]

The city council remained unreconciled, and voted on 28 January 1913, by a vote of nine to seven that the Legislature be requested to repeal the bill.[42] But the board of control was now unstoppable. The first election under the new system was held on 30 April 1913. According to the *Chronicle*, on 5 May, "with a love-feast that verged on the sentimental ere it closed...the City Council who [sic] has governed Halifax for sixty-three years held its final meeting last night and then passed into the limbo of ancient history".[43]

Under the new legislation, the city council not only lost its executive functions, but was also reduced in size. Two aldermen were elected from each ward, and like the controllers, they were to be elected biennially, and all at the same time, unlike the previous system in which one-third of the aldermen came up for election each year. This arrangement was designed to insulate council members from popular pressure. Somewhat anomalously, however, the mayor continued to be subject to annual election.[44] The council, which had previously met weekly, now met at irregular intervals, on average once a fortnight, when the controllers, who were also voting members of council, brought forward their policy proposals and financial recommendations. A recommendation brought forward twice from the board of control to the city council could only be rejected on the second occasion if two-thirds of the councillors voted against it. The board of control thus held the reins of power; barring a common front of aldermen, it could ultimately force its wishes upon the council. The board, which like the council was chaired by the mayor, met generally three times a week, usually at noon.

The reformers had argued that the new system would attract persons of superior abilities to run for the mayoralty and board of control. These hopes were only partially fulfilled. Certainly F.P. Bligh, who was re-elected mayor by acclamation in 1913, was a lawyer of standing in Halifax; he had, however, as mayor from 1912 to 1913, opposed the introduction of a board of control. At the final meeting of the old council he was quoted in the *Chronicle* as stating that he "had not yet become fully convinced of the wisdom of a change and was not entirely converted to the new scheme, but possibly it would work out better than he had feared".[45] This lukewarm attitude perhaps helps to explain Bligh's inade-

41 *Statutes of the Province of Nova Scotia*, 2 Geo. V c. 77.

42 *Minutes of the Halifax City Council*, 28 January 1913, p. 230, (microfilm), Reel 12, RG 35-102 (1), PANS.

43 *Chronicle*, 6 May 1913.

44 *Statutes of the Province of Nova Scotia*, 2 Geo. V c. 77 ss. 2, 4, 13.

45 *Chronicle*, 6 May 1913.

quacy as a chairman; his failure to prevent the controllers from quarrelling undoubtedly contributed to the lack of success of the 1913-1915 board of control.

The first four controllers elected in 1913 hardly matched the rosy expectations of the scheme's begetters. Two were able men, though of limited political experience. One of the key figures in the board's creation, R.V. Harris led the city-wide poll for the election of controllers. Second to him in the poll came W.F. O'Connor, K.C., who had no previous civic experience, and can be considered the only substantial candidate in the field to have been recruited to civic politics as a result of the introduction of the board of control. The other two successful candidates were former aldermen, Charles R. Hoben and Matthew Scanlan, Jr. Scanlan's victory came as a surprise, for he narrowly defeated a much older and more prominent alderman, Peter Martin. Scanlan proved to be much the weakest of the controllers. Both he and Hoben showed little capacity to rise above petty rivalry. Hoben had been a long-standing supporter of board of control government, but apart from this, he bore no resemblance to the reformers' ideal of the civic administrator. He and Scanlan, both veterans of ward politics, brought the flavour of the old council with them, to the discomfort of the more fastidious Harris and O'Connor.

This ill-assorted group of men had met together for only a fortnight when they had to confront a major issue, the strike of the Halifax Electric Tramway workers; this violent strike was punctuated by riots and vandalism, culminating in an incident at the North Street station in which four passengers disembarking from the "Ocean Limited" were beaten up by hundreds of enraged strikers who were under the misapprehension that the travellers were strike-breakers known to be arriving from Montreal.[46] The board of control found itself divided, as was the community, as to what should be done. Mayor Bligh and the board of control proved ineffective in their attempts to mediate between the Tramway Company and the strikers, and Controller Scanlan was quoted by an outraged *Morning Chronicle* as saying, "Must we protect this Company's property?" The board's failure to order the police to arrest rioters and to ask for military intervention led to such headlines in the *Chronicle* as "Controllers Continued to Dodge the Issue: Would Not Lift a Finger to Enforce Law and Order and Prevent a Repetition of the Lawlessness and Violence Which Have Disgraced Halifax".[47] It is important to remember that the pro-company position of the *Chronicle* and its companion paper, the *Daily Echo*, reflected the fact that they were owned by G.F. Pearson, whose father, B.F. Pearson, had formed the Tramway Company in 1895.[48] The *Herald* and the *Mail*, which used the strike

46 R.D. Tennant, Jr., "The Halifax Street Railway", *Nova Scotia Historical Society Collections*, 40 (1980), pp. 145-7. See also *Chronicle*, 19 May 1913. For an excellent account of the tortuous financial history of the Tramway Company during this period, see Christopher Armstrong and H.V. Nelles, "Getting Your Way in Nova Scotia: 'Tweaking' Halifax, 1906-1917", *Acadiensis*, V, 2 (Spring 1976), pp. 105-131.

47 *Chronicle*, 19, 20 May 1913.

48 For the role of the Pearson family in the Tramway Company, see Armstrong and Nelles,

as an opportunity to assail publisher W.H. Dennis' long-standing *bête-noir*, the Tramway Company, and to show marked sympathy for the strikers, adopted quite a different line. In an editorial published after the strike was settled, the *Herald* praised Mayor Bligh and the board of control for their behaviour, particularly for their refusal to call in the military authorities.[49]

The tramway crisis revealed that the fledgling board of control had become embroiled in controversy before it was firmly established. Its conduct over the next few months dashed the hopes of those who looked to it for efficient city management. The *Chronicle* City Hall reporter's accounts, which were the most extensive in the Halifax press, indicate that both the council and the new board continued to wrangle in "the same cantankerous spirit under the new regime that was often in evidence under the old order of things".[50] Matters were taking a turn unforeseen by the reformers. In the middle of June 1913, a feud broke out between controllers Hoben and Scanlan. The latter had asked the board of control to approve a grant to enable the Halifax Fire Department to hold a tournament; Hoben then accused Scanlan of receiving support from the firemen in his election campaign to the tune of $1.00 per man. Tempers did not improve as time passed. Relations between Hoben and Scanlan reached a low ebb at a meeting of council in October 1913, when Scanlan interrupted debate to ask Hoben about selling real estate in Calgary. Hoben replied that he had never sold any there, to which Scanlan retorted, "You sold it in Moose Jaw, though, as I know to my cost...for you stuck me good and plenty". Hoben, according to the reporter, only grinned. Scanlan continued, "I'll take $500.00 for a lot I paid you a thousand for and be glad to get it". The reporter commented, "Controller Hoben grinned some more".[51] Slanging matches had not been uncommon on the old council, but they were particularly damaging to the board of control. Its establishment was supposed to end such petty scenes; moreover an executive of five men could function effectively only if its members got along.

The board of control failed from the beginning either to rise above the type of mundane issues and petty bickering that it had been founded to overcome. Furthermore, it was also clear that the board, whose members were paid $1,000 a year to provide more dynamic, efficient government, failed to do so. The limitations of the new system were made explicit in an important debate which took place on 16 October 1913. The actual issue at stake was the question as to whether the city should pay half the cost of grading Connaught Avenue where it

"Getting Your Way in Nova Scotia", p. 109. For a hagiographic treatment of Pearson, see T.G. MacKenzie, "The Hon. B.F. Pearson, K.C., An Appreciation", *Dalhousie Review*, XXXV(1955-56), pp. 362-9. MacKenzie was Pearson's son-in-law.

49 *Herald*, 19, 20 May 1912. For a detailed analysis of the strike, see Peter D. Lambly, "Working Conditions and Industrial Relations on Canada's Street Railways, 1900-1920", M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1983, pp. 117-30.

50 *Chronicle*, 6 June 1913.

51 *Chronicle*, 17 October 1913.

crossed the new "Edgewood" subdivision. The council had rejected the controllers' recommendation that the city do so, but the controllers referred the issue back to the council for a second time. Under the legislation establishing the new system a matter referred back to the council a second time had to be defeated by two-thirds of the whole council (aldermen and controllers) if it were not to be automatically enacted. In the particular issue in question, two controllers and two aldermen voted for it. Controller Harris, who opposed it, was excused from voting as his law firm represented the developers. The expenditure was, therefore, approved, even though nine councillors voted against it, with only four in favour.[52] The danger of the board's power became obvious in this vote. Not only were the controllers disunited, but the board found itself pitted against the aldermen.

When the board brought in its estimates for the next fiscal year, all of the aldermen (and one of the controllers) voted against them.[53] The increases proposed by the board and the additional taxes these were expected to entail, resulted in attacks in both the Dennis and Pearson newspapers.[54] Although a modified budget did receive approval, newspaper criticism continued. In April 1914, for example, the *Chronicle* and *Echo* asked a number of questions under the headline "What Is Wrong at City Hall"? After putting a series of leading questions, such as, for example, "Is the Board of Control Earning Its Keep"?, the papers asked its readers to respond to three questions: "Is the system at fault? Are the Controllers at fault? Do you favour the Board of Control"?[55] In view of its manifest lack of success, it is hardly surprising that two bills were brought before the Legislature in May 1914, proposing the board's abolition.[56] The city council also passed a motion to this effect, by a vote of 7 to 1. The vote was null and void, however, as two controllers and two aldermen made an orchestrated withdrawal before it was taken, thus denying the meeting a quorum.[57]

The position adopted by the board's supporters in response to its failure to carry out its high purposes was that the fault lay with the men who ran it and not with the system itself. Even the *Chronicle* and the *Echo*, which had been deeply critical of its proceedings, held to this opinion: "Previous to the introduction of the Board of Control system the Board of Trade undertook to secure the election of an efficient council...Perhaps if the leaders in these organizations [e.g. the Board of Trade] were to offer themselves as candidates for the Board of Control instead of attempting to advise a Board of Control made up of men

52 *Minutes of the Halifax City Council*, 16 October 1913, pp. 95-6, Reel 12, RG 35-102, (1), PANS; *Chronicle*, 17 October 1913.

53 *Minutes of the Halifax City Council*, 30 December 1913, p. 138, Reel 12, RG 35-102 (1), PANS; *Chronicle*, 31 December 1913.

54 *Herald*, 5, 12 January 1914; *Chronicle*, 27 January, 7 February 1914.

55 *Chronicle*, 20 April 1914.

56 *Echo*, 22 May 1914.

57 *Echo*, 20 May 1914.

possessing no particular fitness for their office, the City would be better off".[58]

In January 1915 a number of civic organizations, among them the Board of Trade, the Civic Improvement League and the Commercial Club,[59] appointed delegates to a newly formed "Municipal Association". Also involved were the Trades and Labour Council, the Rotary Club, the Household League, the Tax Reform League, the anti-Tuberculosis League and the Women's Council. The purpose of the Municipal Association was to nominate and elect suitable candidates in the upcoming civic election; not surprisingly, given the range of organizations supporting it, the Association had no specific platform. Its president, L.A. Myles, confined himself to stating that "If Halifax is wrong-side up in civic affairs, and we believe it is, we will turn it upside down" [sic].[60] In March, the Municipal Association presented a slate of candidates, proposing Controller O'Connor as mayor and Controller R.V. Harris for re-election to the board of control; it did not endorse either Scanlan, who had put himself forward as a mayoralty candidate, or Hoben, who stood for re-election to the board.[61]

Although the candidates supported by the Municipal Association for the board of control did well, it is significant that not one of the incumbent controllers was elected. Peter Martin, who had failed to achieve election to the board of control in 1913, easily defeated O'Connor for the position of mayor; Scanlan finished a very distant third. Controllers Harris and Hoben finished fifth and sixth in their bids for re-election.[62] Harris' defeat was particularly noteworthy. He, as much as anyone the architect of board of control government, had topped the poll in 1913, and seemed to have a brilliant political future before him. In his attempt at re-election, he finished more than two hundred votes behind the fourth candidate, G.F. Harris. The voters not only repudiated the controllers but also the aldermen; only four were re-elected. If there was truth in the contention that the fault lay with the men and not the system, the voters had put it to the test.

The new group of controllers proved to be much less colourful, but also less contentious than their predecessors. The person of whom most was hoped, and who was, indeed, a protegé of R.V. Harris, was John McKeen, a bank manager whose major interest in municipal affairs lay in the field of taxation. He had lived in Halifax for a relatively short time and had no previous experience as an

58 *Echo*, 25 November 1914.

59 The Commercial Club had been formed in 1913 by a group of business and professional men led by R.V. Harris. Its primary purpose was "to have addresses of interest to all, pertaining to business and public welfare. Partisan and religious subjects excluded [sic]": "Draft Constitution and By-laws", *Annual Report, Commercial Club, 1914-1915*, PANS.

60 *Chronicle*, 19 January 1915.

61 *Chronicle*, 12 March 1915, *Herald*, 12 March 1915.

62 *Chronicle*, 29 April 1915; *Herald*, 29 April 1915. All the candidates for the board of control suppported by the Municipal Association were elected, with the exception of R.V. Harris: *Herald*, 29 April 1915. The results in the aldermanic election were more mixed. In wards where there were contests, four Association-sponsored candidates won, and two lost.

elected representative. His colleagues were competent, if not exciting. James Halliday, a tailor, was an elderly Scot, a former alderman and president of the North British Society, who had emigrated to Nova Scotia in 1873.[63] John T. Murphy, an alderman from 1913 to 1915, was to achieve the unique position of serving two terms as a controller. He was the only one of those elected in 1915 to be re-elected in 1917. He was re-elected to the council as an alderman when the board was abolished and eventually became mayor from 1922 to 1925.[64] The new board of control was led by a veteran of municipal politics, Peter Martin, a painting contractor by trade. Martin had served on the pre-1913 council for 18 years, and was to be elected as Unionist MP for Halifax in the 1917 general election. He was appointed to the Senate in 1921.[65]

Whatever were the intentions of those elected in 1915, their activities were both overshadowed and shaped by the 1914-1918 war. Municipal affairs were relegated to the back pages as Halifax confronted problems completely unforeseen by the originators of the board of control system, such as rapid inflation, and manpower and housing shortages. Nevertheless, the board of control did initiate two major reforms between 1915 and 1917. One was its attempt to emancipate the city from the monopoly over electric power held by the Nova Scotia Tramways and Power Company. On 7 October 1915, upon the recommendation of alderman McKeen, the city council agreed to appoint three aldermen "to join the Board of Control in further negotiations...with a view to drawing up an option of an agreement...with respect to the City obtaining a controlling interest in the Halifax Power Co. Ltd."[66] An agreement was reached on 16 March 1916 under which the city agreed to give the Halifax Power Company, a new company, a contract to light the streets of the city for 25 years for the sum of $30,000 per annum. In 1917, the city committed itself, subject to the approval of the ratepayers by plebiscite, and the completion of the North-east River hydro-electric project by the developers, to giving the company $400,00 in city bonds; in exchange, the city would receive a mortgage of $400,000 on the property and 51 per cent of the company's common stock.[67]

The agreement was vigorously opposed by the Nova Scotia Tramways and Power Company, whose monopoly power it was designed to destroy. Further-

63 There are brief biographies of both McKeen and Halliday in the *Annals of the North British Society of Halifax, 1924-1949* (Halifax, 1949), p. 16 and pp. 25-6.

64 Before his election to the board of control, Murphy had been assistant district manager of Canadian General Electric.

65 E.J. Chambers, ed., *The Canadian Parliamentary Guide 1922* (Ottawa, 1922), p. 83.

66 *Minutes of the Halifax City Council*, 7 October 1915, p. 80, Reel 13, RG 35-102 (1), PANS. See also Minutes, 27 January 1916, p. 134.

67 *Minutes of the Halifax City Council*, 20 March 1916, p. 173, (microfilm), Reel 13, RG 35-102 (1) PANS; *Statutes of the Provinces of Nova Scotia*, 6-7 Geo. V c. 36, schedule A, 7-8 Geo. V c. 88, schedule, "Memorandum of Agreement Between the City of Halifax and the Halifax Power Company". See also Report of the Board of Control on Halifax Electric Power, with attached letters and papers, 20 April 1917, #106, Box 23, RG 35-102 (1B), PANS.

more, the Tramways and Power Company's contract to light the city streets was placed on a year-to-year basis pending the completion of the Halifax Power Company's hydro-electric facility.[68] The agreement with the new company had the support of the vast majority of those sufficiently interested to vote in the plebiscite on the proposed financial terms; of the 2,600 who voted (of 7,662 on the civic list of voters), 2,116 supported the agreement and only 484 opposed it.[69] In the event, however, the Halifax Power Company proved unable to carry through its commitments, and the project was completed by the Nova Scotia Power Commission, a provincial utility created in 1919.

The other major reform, to which Controller McKeen devoted great effort, was the revision of the city's system of taxation. McKeen and his supporters argued in favour of fixed rates to be imposed on the value of business and household property. This provoked much opposition from the upholders of the old system, which was based on a personal property tax.[70] Real estate speculators, such as Ralph P. Bell, were incensed by the prospect of open-ended taxes upon land values.[71] Nevertheless, the measure was passed by the Legislature in 1916, although the dispute between its supporters and opponents continued to simmer, as preparations for the introduction of the reform, such as an experimental assessment, slowly pushed forward.[72] Yet at the time of the April 1917 municipal elections, the board of control remained short on tangible achievement. The agreement with the Halifax Power Company and the new system of municipal taxation were both measures which did not produce immediate concrete results. The first depended on the company's meeting a long-term commitment. The second did not come into operation until August 1918. Three of the four controllers were defeated in their attempts at re-election. Controller McKeen blamed his defeat on the machinations of the Nova Scotia Tramways and Power Company.[73] This does not seem an adequate explanation, in the light of the support given subsequently to the Halifax Power Company contract in the 1918 plebiscite. The low turn-outs for civic elections, and the lack of attention devoted to civic affairs by the newspapers, indicate that there was little interest

68 H.R. Mallison to L. Fred Monaghan, 8, 23 March 1917, #145, Box 23, RG 35-102 (1B), PANS.

69 *Minutes of the Halifax City Council*, 25 April 1918, pp. 203-4, (microfilm), Reel 13, RG 35-102 (1), PANS.

70 *Statutes of the Province of Nova Scotia*, 6-7 Geo. V c. 39. See also *Chronicle*, 24 February, 10 May, 28 September 1916.

71 *Statutes of the Province of Nova Scotia*, 6-7 Geo. V c. 39. See also *Chronicle*, 11 May 1916. Under the legislation, a distinction was drawn between taxes on land, which were left open-ended as a means of raising any shortfall, and taxes upon improvements upon land, which were set at a fixed rate. This arrangement was designed to encourage the development of unimproved land. See F.H. Bell, "Preface", *Tax Act of the City of Halifax* (Halifax, 1918).

72 The new system of taxation was not finally implemented until 24 August 1918. See Province of Nova Scotia Orders-in-Council, 4 July 1918 to 21 November 1919, pp. 26-39, Vol. 26, RG 3, PANS.

73 *Chronicle*, 30 April 1917.

in municipal affairs at a time when the outcome of the war hung in the balance.

Meanwhile the escalating expense of civic government was subjected to savage attack in the *Herald* and *Mail*. The Dennis papers had made considerable journalistic capital out of allegations that civic officials (including councillors) had been responsible for illegally removing (and consuming) confiscated liquor from the office of the Inspector of Licenses, Edwin Tracey, on the evening of the Halifax Explosion, as well as on other occasions. In March 1918, when the city council approved a budget of $994,000, the *Herald's* attacks broadened to become a shrill assault on the council, the board of control, and, indeed, on the system itself.[74]

At the same time that the board of control and the city council were being subjected to continuous attack in the press over the "million dollar budget", the civic administration suffered the humiliation of being excluded from the rebuilding of those areas of the city devastated by the Explosion of December 1917. In the spring of 1918 the Legislature passed an act incorporating the Halifax Relief Commission. This body of three men, appointed by the Governor-General in Council, was given sweeping powers to rebuild the devastated area, an area which the Commission could itself define, without any reference to civic officials. The Commission received full responsibility for planning and reconstruction within this area; it could let contracts without tender and had full discretionary power over the monies it was given.[75] The extraordinary degree of power given to the Commission, and the fact that it was not accountable in any way to either the board of control or the city council, does not seem to have been popular in the devastated north end of the city. Dr. A.C. Hawkins, a life-long resident of the north end and a declared candidate for mayor, strongly opposed the measure, declaring it to be a "blow at democracy".[76]

It is clear that by April 1918, the board of control system had few defenders. In that month a private bill was introduced in the Legislature to permit a plebiscite on the question, "Are you in favour of Abolishing the Board of Control and going back to the former system of City Government by a council of eighteen?"[77] The city council, at a special meeting on 12 April, refused to endorse this proposed legislation. A subsequent motion, calling upon the Legislature to abolish the office of mayor and the board of control and to establish a three-man commission instead, was narrowly defeated by a vote of seven to five, with three of the four controllers voting against.[78] When the enabling legislation came before the committee on private bills and law amendments, those who objected to it did so not so much because they supported the board of control but

74 *Mail*, 9, 19 January 1918; *Herald*, 1 March 1918.

75 *Statutes of the Province of Nova Scotia*, 8-9 Geo. V C. 61, ss. 1, 5, 8, 9, 11, 38, and *passim*.

76 *Herald*, 9 April 1918.

77 *Chronicle*, 15 April 1918.

78 *Minutes of the Halifax City Council*, 12 April 1918, pp. 200-202, (microfilm), Reel 13, RG 35-102 (1), PANS.

because they objected to going back to the old system of civic government. Controller John T. Murphy came closest to an endorsement of the existing arrangements in his suggestion that "much of the feeling against the present system was no doubt due to the increase in the civic expenditure for the coming year".[79]

The opponents of the board of control were thus split between those who wanted to revert to the aldermanic system, and the supporters of commission government, for which a precedent had been set in Halifax by the creation of the Halifax Relief Commission. G.E. Faulkner, who had introduced the enabling legislation in the House, suggested to the committee on private bills and law amendments that the bill might be amended to enable the plebiscite to include the possibility of commission government. In this form the bill received legislative approval. The plebiscite was held on 28 August 1918, but under the legislation, no action was to be taken on the plebiscite unless one-third of qualified voters actually voted; only 931 of 7,422 did so and the plebiscite was thus null and void.[80] The results were nevertheless revealing. Those voting resoundingly rejected the board of control, by 298 to 55, and also rejected the option of a commission, by 219 to 116. The return to aldermanic government, however, was supported by 654 with only 57 against. Despite the low turnout, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that those sufficiently interested to vote upon the question wanted a return to the system which, for all its defects, had been the basis of civic government since the incorporation of Halifax in 1841.

The general lack of interest in the question exhibited in the low turnout for the plebiscite might well have meant that the board of control system could have continued indefinitely, had it not been for a series of events that reached their climax in the same week that the plebiscite was held. In April 1918 A.C. Hawkins, the well-known north end physician and veteran municipal politician, was elected mayor.[81] Hawkins rapidly became embroiled in conflict with the council, and particularly the aldermen. At a meeting of the board of control on 20 August, he called the aldermen "doughheads and damn fools". This led to a disorderly council meeting on 26 August, from which the enraged aldermen withdrew; by 3 September, ten of 12 aldermen had resigned. As a result, no quorum for council meetings existed, and as by-elections could be called only on the council's authority, the vacancies could not be filled. Accordingly, until the next aldermanic elections in 1919, the city would have to be run by the mayor and the controllers, none of whom resigned. One of the ironies of the story of the board of control in Halifax is that despite its ineffectiveness during its short life,

79 *Herald*, 17 April 1918.

80 *Statutes of the Province of Nova Scotia*, 8-9 Geo. V c. 65, s. 9(2); *Minutes of the Halifax City Council*, 5 June 1919, p. 14, "Plebiscite re Form of Civic Government — August, 1918", Reel 14, RG 35-102 (1), PANS.

81 *Minutes of the Halifax City Council*, 25 April 1918, p. 204, (microfilm), Reel 13, RG 35-102 (1), PANS; see also Roper, "The Strange Political Career of A.C. Hawkins", from which I have taken certain sentences *in extenso* in this paragraph.

it had been given so much statutory authority that, in the absence of a council, it was possible for the mayor and board to run the city. Financial difficulties were alleviated by the promise of the provincial government to pass retroactive legislation validating borrowings made by the board. Mayor Hawkins, despite public pressure, showed no eagerness to call by-elections, even though Premier George H. Murray assured him that they would be validated by the Legislature.

Hawkins and the board of control ran the city until the next municipal election. In March of 1919, as a result of an initiative of concerned citizens, comprising both supporters and opponents of the existing system, a bill was presented to the Legislature and passed into law. Under the terms of the legislation, yet another plebiscite was to be held in Halifax, on the simple question, "Are you in favour of doing away with the Board of Control and returning to a Council of eighteen Aldermen?" If more than 15 per cent of those qualified to vote did so, and voted in favour of the question, the city would automatically revert to the old aldermanic system as provided for in the City Charter of 1907.[82] In the event, the turnout on 30 April 1919 was about 25 per cent, with 1,760 voting in favour of the question and only 250 opposed.[83] Municipal elections under the charter of 1907 were held on 28 May 1919, and on 3 June the aldermanic system was formally resurrected.[84]

The board of control had accomplished none of the things its begetters had hoped of it in 1911. Orderly, rational government had not followed from institutional change; both circumstances, and the characters of the men into whose hands the instrument was placed, shaped the new system into a distorted resemblance of the old. After the first burst of zeal, the same type of politician, indeed some of the same politicians, took over, and the board simply became a large standing committee, somewhat like the old standing committees of the old council, but one whose large powers only amplified the animosities which had previously existed. Instead of institutionalizing a harmonious executive, the board of control system institutionalized conflict between a jealous council and the board. Where delay and strife existed, the board magnified them; where the old system had been wasteful, the new one remained so, and in view of the salaries paid to the controllers, expensive as well.

The experience of board of control government in cities other than Halifax was mixed. According to Alan Artibise, "The Board of Control system served the needs of Winnipeg's commercial elite well" in the seven years following its creation.[85] This was certainly a marked contrast to Halifax, where, six years after its inception, the board of control disappeared. One reason for the difference may be that the aldermanic system had existed in Halifax for so much

82 *Statutes of the Province of Nova Scotia*, 9-10 Geo. V c. 80, s. 13 (2), s. 19.

83 *Minutes of the Halifax City Council*, 5 June 1919, p. 15, "Plebiscite as to Form of Civic Government April 30, 1919", (microfilm), Reel 14, RG 35-102 (1), PANS.

84 "Constitution of City Council", *ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

85 Alan F.J. Artibise, *Winnipeg*, p. 57.

longer than in the relatively new, rapidly expanding Winnipeg of the pre-war era. Furthermore, in Halifax there had been no unanimity about the value of change among the commercial and professional class even during the period of reform enthusiasm between 1910 and 1912.

The excessive belief in the benefits of structural change, manifested in the thinking of R.V. Harris and his associates, was not confined to Halifax. As John Weaver has put it, "The structure of civic government provided a convenient whipping boy, one which could be hauled out at each sign of stress or during periods when city government was expected to perform some new miracles to both spur and accommodate growth".[86] The board of control in Halifax did produce some changes, but it could not live up to the expectations of its progenitors, because these could not be realized by structural alteration alone. In Halifax as elsewhere, reformers were limited by their preconceptions, in particular their unquestioning belief in business values and their distrust of the political process. This narrowness of vision provided no effective analysis of chronic social ills, such as housing, and no solution to industrial underdevelopment; beyond the reform of the tax system, and greater control of public utilities, the reformers had no ideas that transcended generalities about "progress" and "efficiency".[87] Their instrument, the board of control, was accordingly unable to meet the challenge of dealing with the fundamental social and economic problems of Halifax.

86 J.C. Weaver, *Shaping the Canadian City*, p. 76.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 73.