

# Greater Winnipeg next year will be first to move beyond split-level government

by  
Peter  
Desbarats



Winnipeg will begin the new year as the first major Canadian city to move beyond the stage of split-level metropolitan government to a single administration for its entire Metropolitan area.

On the first day of January, Winnipeg area municipalities, including the historic French-speaking city of St. Boniface, will cease to exist as functioning municipal units. Their local governments will be replaced by a 50-member greater Winnipeg city council which will rule an urban territory approximately 17 miles in diameter with a population close to 550,000.

## The 'Unicity'

Signs of the change already are apparent.

There are now "Unicity" bus stops on the streets of downtown Winnipeg; and one of the first budget items of the Unicity administration is \$55,000 to increase the councillors' seating capacity of Winnipeg's city hall from 18 to 50.

The new system was first proposed last December by a provincial government study group headed by Finance Minister Saul Cherniak.

Elections for the new council were held early last month when the New Democratic Party, attempting to duplicate its 1969 provincial victory at the city level, elected only seven of 39 candidates, and when Winnipeg's Mayor Stephen Juba, in power since 1956, became the first mayor-elect of greater Winnipeg.

In adopting the new system, Winnipeg maintains its reputation as a laboratory of urban experimentation. In the early years of this century, progressive municipal administrations gave the city the finest set of public utilities in the country, partly because of over-optimistic forecasts of the city's growth. The city's water supply, for instance, remained adequate for decades, until the middle of this century. The city owns and operates its own hydro and steam generating plants. The stadium and arena are municipally-owned, as is the world's largest enclosed swimming pool built for the

Pan-American Games in 1967.

In 1960 Winnipeg became the second city in Canada to adopt a metropolitan form of government, but, unlike Toronto, it opted for a metro council directly elected by the citizens. Some Canadian cities, in particular Montreal with more than 30 municipalities on the island of Montreal, are still in the initial phases of metropolitan organization.

The main complaints about the first metropolitan system in Winnipeg were that it lacked authority to equalize the tax burden effectively and to distribute services rationally throughout the metropolitan councils left most citizens hopelessly confused.

## Equal taxes

The new council has been elected by 50 single wards so that every citizen has one councillor who represents him directly. All taxing powers will be vested in the Unicity council from the outset, along with sole authority for the hiring of municipal employees.

Mill rates will be equalized throughout the Metropolitan area with subsidies by the provincial government to compensate, to some extent and only for the first two years, those local taxpayers who will pay higher taxes because of the equalization.

According to the provincial government, the biggest jump will be a six-mill increase in the former municipality of Tuxedo which is, as its name indicates, the black tie neighborhood in greater Winnipeg.

Greater Winnipeg's administrative structure was devised with the assistance of two Toronto-based consultants: Mayor Brownstone, professor of political economy (public administration) at the University of Toronto, and Lionel Feldman, who has taught political science and public administration at universities in Ottawa, Victoria and Toronto and who has his own consulting firm in Toronto. It is a "council-commissioner" system similar to



Mayor Juba

those operating in Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver, with a four-man board of full-time commissioners responsible under council for the general management of the city.

This arrangement already has its critics. Last Oct. 23, the Winnipeg Tribune described it in this way: "The one-big-city has community committees making recommendations to standing committees of council which, in turn, make recommendations to a non-elected board of commissioners which make recommendations to a 10-member executive policy committee which makes recommendations to council."

## Experiment

The community committees referred to in the editorial are the truly experimental feature of the new system.

There are eight of these committees with jurisdictions corresponding for the most part with the old municipal jurisdictions. For instance, the former city of St. Boniface with a population of 45,000 is now divided into four wards, each electing one member of the Unicity council. But these four councillors also constitute the new St. Boniface community commit-

tee, so that a form of local government survives but with severely curtailed authority.

The community committees can propose local projects to the Unicity council, administer some local services and, in some cases, allocate funds provided by the Unicity council. But their main function is to serve as a direct pipeline between the citizens and the council. The effectiveness of these community committees will determine the extent of real democracy within the highly centralized system.

Mayor Stephen Juba, who never concealed his dislike of the previous system, is positive that Unicity will enable him to go out of office in 1974 with a flourish. He said in an interview that housing and public transit will be his top priorities during his final term and that he is ready to work toward a program of public ownership of land for residential purposes.

## Common sense

"I can't speak for the new council," he said, "But it just makes common sense. I'm an elected representative and I can see the writing on the wall and I know that a fellow can't afford to pay \$30,000 for a house when the house is not worth \$30,000. And I say that it's my responsibility to do something about it."

This approach presumably will receive an attentive hearing from the province's NDP government. Unicity is also in the fortunate position of having a great deal of land assessed as agricultural within its boundaries, as well as control of planning in a five-mile belt outside its limits.

"We can and we will urge our government to buy this land, just as we bought land for industrial parks," said the Mayor. "We can buy this

land, service it, and then sell it at cost for fair-priced homes."

Housing is also a main concern of one of the youngest members of Mayor Juba's Unicity council, a 27-year-old Metis who is director of the city's Indian-Metis friendship centre. The two men, Stephen Juba and George Munroe, make an interesting comparison. In 1956, Juba was the first Winnipegger of Ukrainian origin to break the municipal power of the city's British-origin citizens.

## Creative potential

Munroe is the first municipal representative of the Indian and Metis people who have increased their numbers in Winnipeg from a few thousand in the late fifties to about 30,000 today.

Congregated largely in Munroe's Central Ross House Ward, which also contains the new Richardson skyscraper and the Centennial Centre Theatre complex, these native peoples are Winnipeg's most obvious social problem. George Munroe also believes that they represent "a creative potential so great that someday it will make the Renaissance look like kindergarten by comparison."

Munroe and Juba will probably clash at the outset over the city's plan to build a huge convention centre in Munroe's ward. But there are signs that Winnipeg's native peoples have already absorbed a few things from Juba and other wily members of the city's now-powerful Ukrainian-Canadian group.

"I'll probably end up voting against the centre," said Munroe, "but there's nothing I can do, short of blowing up the bloody building, that can change it. What I have to do now is to figure out ways and

means to make it benefit the people, to make use of it.

For instance, we could use it as a wedge in our negotiations with government. We could say: You guys have put seven and a half million dollars into a convention centre that completely disregards three quarters of the population in this area. So how about a simultaneous program for us? We can't have one part of town growing up at the expense of another."

That, of course, is what Unicity is all about.

(Toronto Star Syndicat)