

Title	Municipal tramways
Sub Title	
Author	McLaren, W. W.
Publisher	三田学会
Publication year	1911
Jtitle	三田学会雑誌 (Keio journal of economics). Vol.5, No.4 (1911. 10) ,p.443(95)- 469(121)
JaLC DOI	
Abstract	
Notes	論説
Genre	Journal Article
URL	<a href="https://koara.lib.keio.ac.jp/xoonips/modules/xoonips/detail.php?koara_id=AN00234610-19111020-0095">https://koara.lib.keio.ac.jp/xoonips/modules/xoonips/detail.php?koara_id=AN00234610-19111020-0095</a>

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## MUNICIPAL TRAMWAYS.

### I.

Municipal ownership and operation of Tramways in many western countries is so common a form of local administrative activity that it gives rise to little or no comment. In Britain, a city council wishing to undertake any form of municipal trade, provided the people generally support their representatives, can always obtain the consent of Parliament or the Local Government Board. In Germany, cities have been as a general thing left free either to grant franchises to private companies or undertake the public operation of public utilities. Occasionally the Central Government interferes, as in the case of the Greater Berlin Street Railway Company's franchise, which was extended for 30 years by the Government, in spite of the opposition of the local government and the citizens of Berlin. In France and the other Latin countries of Europe, the policy generally followed has been to operate public utility enterprises through private corporations, the franchises in all cases being loaded with conditions so as to protect the interests of the public and give the city a share in the

profits of the enterprise. In the United States of America, owing to the peculiar control which the State Legislatures exercise over local government, the practice with regard to municipal ownership of tramways is by no means uniform. The early experience of the North Central States with public works led to the insertion of clauses in the State constitutions prohibiting the public operation of public utilities. In the newer States, no such prohibition ever existed, and in some of the older States the clause has been deleted. However, the general practice throughout the whole country has been the operation of the street-railways by private enterprise under franchises of limited duration, and usually with conditions which protect the interests of the public.

In Japan, the Central Government, through the Home Minister, exercises very strict control over the local administration. The policy of the Central Government has been in the past one of steady opposition to the development of municipal trading, with the single exception of water-works; nearly every city in Japan supplies water, but the other public utilities operated by the public can be counted on the fingers of one hand,—viz., the Osaka tramway system, the Yokohama gas works, and now the Tokyo street railways. On the whole, then, it has been difficult for Japanese cities to get

permission from the Government to take over their great utilities.

Looking back over these facts in connection with the practice of various nations in the matter of public or private operation of public utilities, at least one useful generalisation may be made. Those countries in which the movement in the direction of public ownership has advanced farthest are the countries in which most interest is taken in public affairs by the citizens in general. It is not a matter of democratic or bureaucratic institutions; England is democratic, and Germany is bureaucratic, and yet it is in these two countries that the greatest development of municipal trading is to be found. In the United States, the Central Government is republican in form, and the people democratic, but nevertheless there is scarcely any municipal trading, if the supply of water be left out of account. In the United States, the people are so individualistic, so intent upon their private affairs, that they have little time to give to the consideration of local public concerns. Municipal government has been carried on, not by the public-spirited citizens of good repute, but by the small politicians, who live by politics, and who constitute a dangerous parasitic class, whose personal interest is to govern extravagantly, if not dishonestly. The well known history of practically every

8 large American city offers numerous proofs of the truth of these strictures. The refusal of the people to put into the hands of the local administrations the control of great public utilities is a demonstration not only of the strength of the private corporations supplying such services, but of the good sense of the public. Until the city government is controlled by able men of public spirit, the powers of that government should be and actually have been confined to the narrowest limits. The difference between bureaucratic Germany and bureaucratic Japan, is a difference which lies not in government but the people. In the former country the good citizen exercises a constant control over the local administration by the interest which he takes in its work, usually consenting to serve on the Magistrats-rath as one of the non-professional members, and even in a purely private capacity he does not hesitate to voice his sentiments with regard to the actions of the local government. The magnificent work accomplished during the last thirty years by practically every industrial city in Prussia, as well as in Hamburg and Bremen, is all that is necessary to prove the courage, ability, and integrity of the city councils of Germany. In Japan, practically no interest is taken in local politics by the intelligent classes. The "three class system," under which municipal elections are conducted,

makes it practically impossible for any but the few rich to exercise control over the city government. The rich in Japan, just as in America, are too engrossed in the amassing of more riches to pay much attention to the conduct of public affairs. As a result there is neither criticism nor encouragement of the administration's work, except from the professional publicists, who fill the newspapers with columns which are not read seriously by the people. Public spirit, if it exists at all in a city, must exist in those men who have no professional interest in government. Until that spirit arises in Japanese cities it is the part of wisdom to confine within the narrowest limits the functions of city government. Looked at from this point of view, the recent municipalisation of the Tokyo tramways is an experiment the success of which is open to doubt.

## II.

In some respects, a tramway system in a large and growing city is the most desirable form of public utility for the local authorities to operate. The service rendered by such a utility is almost a necessity to a large proportion of the citizens. The demand for it is as constant as that for water or food, and has a tendency to increase with the population, and especially with the rising standard

of comfort among the masses. The authorities may confidently look forward to a constant or increasing return from the traffic receipts, and may therefore reasonably hope for a successful issue in a financial way from their enterprise. Upon the other hand, a street railway has the disadvantage of belonging to a class of enterprises in which the capital expenses are very great, and the plant when constructed can be used only for the sole purpose of transportation. Moreover street-railways require the expenditure of a large proportion of the gross receipts upon mere operation charges; consequently even a slight decline in the receipts, as a result of a change in the habits or the standard of living of the people, or a slight relative increase in the expenses of operation due to a rise in wages or inefficient management, may wipe out the net profits, and leave the enterprise bankrupt.

To offset these difficulties, it should also be said that a street-railway, as every other transportation enterprise, stands to gain as the result of an increase of traffic, since its fixed charges are largely independent of the number of passengers carried. Thus a tramway system pays the interest on the capital invested, the wages of its office staff, of its car-crews, shop-men, etc., no matter what the amount of the traffic carried; if the traffic increases 10 % the extra receipts are to be considered clear gain, or almost so. This tendency to increasing returns is particularly liable in the case of street-railways in large cities, where there are no regulations with regard to the number of passengers who may be crowded into a car.

In quite a different respect tramway service is a desirable public utility for a municipality to own and operate. From the point of view of its social significance, it is often possible for a city, through the public ownership of the facilities for rapid transit, to confer upon the people such great benefits as would compensate for even an increase of taxation in order to conduct the enterprise. The health, safety and comfort of the citizens of any great city depend to a larger extent than we usually suppose upon the character of its street-railways. In order to render the greatest service to the public, the tramway system must be as extensive as possible, considering the necessities of finance, and it must be operated with the greatest possible speed, regularity and safety.

To each of these two large aspects, the one *financial*, the other *social*, we must give a certain amount of consideration. It seems sensible to say that the whole question of tramways lies within

102 these limits, and every corporation, whether public or private, which is engaged in this form of public service, has to decide its policy by a compromise between the financial and social problems which may arise. The tendency of private corporations has been to consider the financial aspect first and foremost; the hope of public ownership lies in a more faithful taking into account of the social aspect.

We turn first to the *social* aspects. Two chief questions are to be considered, the service rendered to the general public, and the labor problem involved in the employment of the large number of workmen necessary to operate the system. The former is, of course, vastly more important than the latter, especially in a country such as Japan, where the general labor question is still in an inchoate state. Nevertheless, the relatively large number of men employed by the Tokyo street-railway calls for some attention to be given to the hours, conditions of work, and wages of the men. Generally speaking, the whole conditions of work should be such as to promote and permit of efficiency. The fact that so much depends upon the intelligence and alertness of the drivers and the courtesy of the conductors, makes it necessary to offer such wages and hours as will obtain men suited for such work, and having once entered the service, will retain them in their positions for

the longest possible time. Without attempting any statistical comparison of the wages and hours of the drivers and conductors of the street cars in Tokyo, with those of men in employments that may be said to be similar, it is fair to remark, as symptomatic, that one seldom sees a middle-aged man driving a car. This fact would indicate that something is wrong with the service, that there is something which makes it impossible for a man to enter that service and remain in it during the whole period of his active life. Is it that the wages paid by the street railways company in the past have not been enough to retain men of mature years? Or is the manifest lack of men over 30 years of age as drivers or conductors due to the comparatively recent origin of the occupation? Under public ownership, the social relation between the system and its employees ought to improve, and probably will, provided there is not too much interference with the workmen for political or other reasons, or too little recognition given to efficiency of service. Medals, or public recognition of excellence in an employee, is not enough to encourage the development of general efficiency. The acknowledgement ought to be accompanied by an increase of pay, either with or without promotion to positions of greater usefulness and responsibility. A seasoned, and therefore an efficient staff is

101 one of the surest signs of a well managed system, for without such a staff, accidents are bound to be of frequent occurrence, the service slow and uncertain, and travel generally uncomfortable.

In the experience of English cities, the taking over of the tramways by the public corporation has always been followed by a great improvement in the conditions of labor and the wages paid to the workmen. In Manchester, for example, the hours were cut in two, and the wages doubled with beneficial financial results, owing to the increased efficiency of the workman. It remains to be seen what the city of Tokyo will be able to accomplish in this respect. Certainly one of its greatest opportunities for social development lies along these very lines, — to improve the staff of its tramways by offering such advantageous conditions of labor as will draw into its service and retain there a class of older, more intelligent and honest men. A parsimonious policy has only one result in the long run, viz., an inferior and inefficient group of workmen, who will serve well neither the travelling public nor the management. The dishonesty recently unearthed in connection with the drivers and conductors of the Osaka tramlines is only an example of what is bound to occur when men of no character are employed in positions of trust. The services of men of character can only be obtained by the payment of adequate wages for work performed under reasonable conditions.

With regard to the other and much more important social aspect of a tramway system, its relation to the general public, it may be said that the service ought to be such as to conduce to the health, safety, and comfort of the travelling public. The health of a city depends directly and indirectly in large measure upon the distribution of its population. Densely crowded districts are a fruitful source of disease, and in times of epidemic offer problems which are practically impossible to solve. The greatest possible suburbanisation of a city constitutes the best safeguard against disease among the poorer classes. To the poor man, the tramway offers the only possibility of living at a distance from his work, on the outskirts of the city where land is cheap and rents low, and more important still, where there is plenty of fresh air and sunlight in which his children may grow up amid wholesome surroundings. The richer people are to a certain degree able to create their residential suburbs without the assistance of the tramway, but the working-man must either walk, or ride in a street-car. To serve the public in this respect, the network of the system must be as extensive as possible, reaching out in every direction



§ 1 to the outskirts of the city, and extending its termini as the people move farther into the country. The astonishing difference between the mediæval and the modern city in their relative death-rates is to a large degree, though not entirely, the result of the greater facilities for rapid transit in the latter which does away with the necessity for overcrowding in central wards.

From this point of view, a publicly owned system has great advantages over a private enterprise. Under private ownership the necessity of making dividends often precludes the expenditure of adequate sums upon the extension of the lines. There is no doubt that extensions into sparsely populated or even fully populated suburbs, do not pay as well as the lines which are operated in the centre of the city. For financial reasons, private companies are always opposed to a policy of extensions, and this conflict of interests has been the cause of never-ending trouble between the city authorities and the private companies in all places where the lines are operated privately. Under municipal management there is an undoubted advantage in this respect, provided that the city's tram-system is not so heavily burdened financially as to leave no possibility of making extensions out of profits, nor so inefficiently managed as to make no profits at all. Extensions should always be financed out of *profits*, not upon capital account, for the simple reason that they do not, for a considerable time at any rate, add to the traffic-receipts in proportion to the capital required for their construction.

At this point a difficult question arises with regard to extensions of the tramlines, viz., the fare which is to be charged. For example, a private company or municipality spends 10,000,000 yen upon extending its lines, and finds that the traffic receipts have increased as a result only 300,000 yen, or at the rate of 3%. If the capital was borrowed at 5%, the company or the city is losing rapidly as a result of this policy. It therefore becomes necessary to increase the fares in some way or other, so as to bring up the traffic receipts. The problem is, should the general fare be raised, or should the fare on the extensions only be increased, by the adoption of the zone-tariff system, or by the payment of an additional sum for a transfer. This question has been raised in Tokyo during the last three years, and will probably be mooted again in the near future. In the past the question was settled by the Government's flat refusal to permit any kind of an increase, but in the future such a solution will not be possible, for it will be either a higher fare or a higher municipal tax, and of these



two alternatives the higher fare is certainly preferable, since it comes out of the pockets of those who use the trams. If such is the case, what is to be said about the method of raising the fares? The choice between a higher general fare with a universal transfer, or the present fare with an extra charge for a transfer, is not easy to make, since there are strong arguments to be advanced in favor of either alternative. The adoption of a zone tariff system, which is the English method, is not desirable because it would necessitate an entire change in the whole system of charges, and such a complete change would be very difficult to carry into effect. Moreover, English experience has proved that payment according to distance has resulted in confining the people of a city within the limits of the zone for which the fare is  $1\frac{1}{2}$  pence (6 sen). Judged by the standard of the widest suburban sation, the zone-tariff system is a failure, and the Tokyo government should not consider it. Of the other two alternatives, the advantage lies with the higher fare and the universal transfer, because such a policy would yield a larger revenue, and at the same time would not discourage the growth of suburbs. An extra sum for a transfer would inevitably result in the limitation of districts in which the working-man could live. In the mind of the writer of this article, anything which

detracts from the system's performance of its great *social service* to the public must be avoided.

Turning to consider the other features of the tramway's social service, it is necessary to revert to the question of the safety and comfort of the public, which is affected in several different ways by the street cars. First there are to be considered the people, in the streets along which the lines are operated, and second, the people who use the cars. With regard to the street population, precautions must be taken not to injure or kill any person lawfully using the thoroughfare. In this matter much depends upon the habits of the people but it is a safe rule for the company to hold the drivers of the cars responsible for all accidents which occur involving loss of life or serious personal injury. As to the criminal responsibility of the drivers in such cases the law must of course decide, but it is possible for the management of the system to enforce the greatest carefulness by a policy of dismissing all drivers who permit their cars to injure any person or destroy any property. A general rule may be laid down, the cars must not drive the public off the thoroughfares, nor should the people unnecessarily impede the passage of the cars along the streets.

111 taken by the drivers in avoiding collisions, leaving the rails in rounding curves, losing control of the cars on steep grades, or other forms of accidents which may occur. At times such accidents arise from defects in the rolling-stock, but even in such cases the causes of the accidents lie only one step farther back, in the careless work of the shop-men who are supposed to test the brakes, motors, wheels and other vital parts of the cars before they are sent out from the barns. Accidents to passengers, and what is still more frequent, discomfort, may be almost entirely precluded by the careful performance of his work by every man employed to operate a street-railway system. Carelessness in some part of the work is the sole cause of nearly every untoward event which results in suffering or death to the innocent patrons of the lines.

Another factor upon which depends much of the social service of a street-railway is the speed and regularity with which the cars are operated. In all surface systems there is a physical limit to the rate at which a car may be driven, and that limit is soon reached. Where there are neither elevated nor underground tracks, rapid transit is quite impossible, for great speed requires that there be no obstacles upon the right of way, as well as long distances between stops, and a variety of rail which would make the ordinary street traffic impossible. However, in a large city, where only surface cars are operated, it is absolutely necessary for the convenience of the patrons of the lines that the cars be driven at all times at the maximum speed which is consistent with public safety, and with unbroken regularity. Even with perfect operation of the present system, Tokyo can never hope to obtain rapid transit until subways have been constructed, and underground trains run at such a high speed as will cover the distance from one end of the city to the other in half an hour or less.

### III

Having dealt at some length with the *social* aspects of a tramway, and with some of the problems connected therewith, it is necessary to examine in a general way the *financial* aspect. Major Darwin, the best English authority upon Municipal Trade, advises cities against undertaking the management of public utilities with the expectation of making money, for from the experience of English municipal enterprises, he finds but little prospect of such hopes being realised. In the same vein a writer in the "Times" has recently made the statement that the municipal trams in England,

except those in the largest cities, are compelled to pursue a policy in finance which will eventually lead to an increase in local taxation, although for the time being they are ostensibly paying their way. The "Report on the Private or Public Operation of Public Utilities," published by the National Civic Federation of the United States in 1907 also contains a general warning to cities against taking over public utilities for the sake of gain. At the annual meeting of the Vereins für Sozial Politik held in Vienna in 1910, the general subject of Municipal trade was discussed, and a surprising amount of opposition upon financial grounds was developed. All the experts agree upon this one point—that a city should not take up trading enterprises to supplement the funds in the treasury, the reason given being the liability of financial loss connected with every such enterprise. If for reasons other than profit, it becomes necessary to municipalise public utilities, if the health or safety of the public can be secured in no other way, then cities must assume their proper responsibilities, and be prepared to pay whatever that action costs. For each individual city, the question of municipalising any particular service must be decided only after canvassing the other alternatives and counting the cost of each. To the writer it does not seem necessary to prove that a public corporation any more than a private

individual should not contract obligations which it cannot meet, except in those urgent cases where it is a choice between death or debt. For a city to contract a large debt solely to conduct an experiment in public management of a street railway system seems quite as foolish as for a man to mortgage his property to provide a wedding feast for his daughter.

It is in this way that the matter of finance comes into prominence in every project of municipal trading. It stands in the background, unseen by the great majority of the people, unheeded by the optimistic, but considered by those upon whom the actual work of management will fall, if the project is carried through. The life story of many a municipal enterprise contains at least two chapters, the first full of hope and confidence in ultimate success, or of indignation against the abuses of the private company; the second, full of difficulties connected with interest charges on the debt, details of operation, or even the great main lines of policy. If finance is not and should not be the first, it is and should be the last consideration, under ordinary circumstances, determining the action of the public upon projects of municipal ownership.

A certain amount of pertinency is given to the above general remarks by the recent action of

the Tokyo local government in taking over the tramways. After the event is hardly the time to offer any criticism, for there is nothing which can now alter the fact. Whether the administration of the city acted wisely in this matter only time can determine. That the press of the city was opposed to the project is well known, and equally well known that the great mass of the citizens took no interest whatever in the matter. Why the Municipal Council and Assembly should have consented to a project which only a year or two ago they rejected, will sooner or later be explained, as will also the action of the Central Government in permitting the municipalisation, a project to which it refused its consent a short time before. However, the time is not yet for answering such questions. It is enough to draw attention to the fact that the private company received its charter and sold out its property under very similar outward circumstances, at least; the absence of Hoshi Toru from the latter constituted the chief difference between the transactions of 1899 and 1911.

Whatever the secrets of the affair happen to be, the action of the authorities has at least been arbitrary, the precedent probably being derived from the conduct of the Prussian Government in foisting on the municipality of Berlin a private tramway system for a period of 30 years longer than the charter granted by the city provided for. The important fact to be faced by the Tokyo government is the necessity of operating successfully a great public utility, and under the word "successfully" must be included not only the financial but the social aspects of the enterprise.

The financial standing of the system is extremely complicated; first because the property includes not only the tram lines, but a lighting plant as well, second because the purchase price paid was about double the actual cost of construction, and third, because the municipality has committed itself to a policy of wholesale extensions, by borrowing a little over one third in excess of the purchase money, a round one hundred millions. Whether an enterprise which a few years ago earned a little under seven millions can meet the interest charges upon such an enormous debt, as well as pay its other obligations, is to say the least doubtful, unless its balances its accounts by drawing upon money borrowed from abroad. Such financing may be justified in the case of a nation, but never for an instant in a municipality.

It is comforting to a degree, when facing this ogre of financial difficulty, to reflect that Tokyo is not the first city in the world to pay an enormous sum for an unexpired franchise, nor is it the first

21 city to begin to operate its tramways under a cloud of debt. Practically every English city has had to go through the same experience, and in some cases, at any rate, careful management has worked wonders in the course of a decade. The city of Manchester began operating her tramways with a heavy handicap in the shape of franchise purchase money, but in the course of the last ten years most of the water has been squeezed out of her debt, without involving any serious starving of the renewals account on the sinking fund. The same may be accomplished in Tokyo. The difference between the two cases is largely a difference of sentiment; in Manchester the citizens take an interest in the work and trust the members of the Tramways Committee, in Tokyo the people take no interest in the enterprise, nor do they believe in the members of the Electric Bureau. Public apathy is the worst possible atmosphere in which to work, especially when it is coupled with the almost complete administrative independence of the Bureau.

Moreover, during the few feverish days of June which elapsed between the public announcement of the project and its passage into law, the arguments advanced in favor of municipalisation were nearly all of a monetary nature, i. e., the revenue which the city would derive from the enterprise.

This attitude of mind was fundamentally wrong, and the details of many of the arguments were so palpably inaccurate as to cast doubt upon the ability of many responsible people to think sensibly about finance. For example, a "high official" came out with the statement that the city would save the amount received annually from the company in the form of taxes, which sum capitalised amounted to 14,000,000 yen; the city would be, therefore, better off by that large sum simply as the result of municipalisation. That the general public was taken in by such statements the writer does not for an instant believe;—the people's attitude was one of helplessness, the Government had decided, and the people must acquiesce, whatever the consequences.

As to these consequences, what must be done in order that they may be as little damaging as possible? Without an increased fare financial success is almost impossible, therefore the Electric Bureau must aim to make the service socially a great benefit to the city. How is this to be done? If done at all, it must consist in a gradual improvement of the working staff so as to attain the greatest possible degree of efficiency. By enforcing a strict discipline, accidents may be almost completely done away with, vexatious delays may be avoided, the discomfort of overcrowded cars may be reduced to



87 a minimum. A body of devoted men, including drivers, conductors, shop-men, starters, foremen, inspectors, etc., cooperating heartily with the management, can and will greatly improve the service. The method of creating this devoted staff is simply higher wages, shorter hours, dismissal of incompetent or careless men, etc. Those methods are all well known, and may be studied in connection with any well managed industrial enterprise, and, what is more, the general experience has been that the most efficient labor is in the long run the cheapest, even though wages are higher.

The proposed extensions of the network will also make opportunities for the Bureau to enlarge its social service. Unfortunately extensions involve not only the outlay of large sums on capital account, but a proportionate diminution of the traffic receipts; and hence will only aggravate the financial difficulties, already great enough. However, the municipality will be able to recoup part of its additional outlay upon more tram-lines by the increase of the taxes which it will be able to collect upon land transferred from agriculture to building sites, and upon the houses which will be rapidly built upon those sites. Moreover the city administration will be able to coordinate more completely its work of suburbanisation, advancing farther into the outlying districts not only the

means of transportation, but also streets, drainage, water, light, and police protection. At the present time the general complaint is that the suburbs are more unhealthy than the central wards, owing to the lack of the ordinary sanitary arrangements. In this matter the city administration has a field for labor in which sensible and vigorously conducted efforts will produce great result, and add greatly to the welfare of the masses of the people.

Judging from the present condition of Tokyo, and comparing it with cities in western countries, the conclusion seems fairly certain that the local authorities have not succeeded in making the city as satisfactory a place of residence for the citizens, as the average large city in Europe or America is for its residents. The streets are so poorly made as to be covered with mud on wet and dust on dry days, lighting of the streets is everywhere inadequate, drainage in a modern sense has no existence whatever, rapid-transit there is none, even the most important thoroughfares are not paved nor kept clean, fire protection is still furnished by mediaeval appliances, building regulations do not seem to have been heard of, the smoke nuisance grows unchecked. It is sometimes said by way of excuse that Tokyo has not had time nor money to modernise itself, but is it not

is true that Tokyo has been growing upon modern lines quite as long as nearly all cities in the western world? Since 1860 practically every city on continental Europe has transformed itself, throwing off its mediæval aspect, its walls, moats, narrow streets, etc., and taking on a modern appearance and equipment, e.g. Florence, Naples, Vienna, Buda-Pest, Hamburg, Bremen, Frankfort, Strasburg and so on through a long list. Even English, Scotch, and Irish cities have accomplished similar results during the same period. Nor can it be truthfully said that Tokyo is relatively poorer than any of the cities above mentioned. Nor does there seem to be any lack of money, or else why should so much be spent in the form of an entertainment to celebrate the completion of practically every public-work of importance? The new Nihonbashi is opened with a demonstration worthy of the coronation of an Emperor, for which the city pays. The completion of the spending of nineteen millions upon the widening of the streets is signalised by the distribution of seventy thousand yen among the men responsible for the expenditure, the Mayor himself accepting ten thousand. Surely only a rich city can give away its funds in such a fashion.

Newness and poverty cannot really be made the excuse for the conditions in Tokyo when compared with practically any capital city and many provincial cities in western countries. The fault, if fault there is, must be attributed to the administration, and to the general lack of interest taken by the citizens in their own government. Under the circumstances, with what other attitude of mind than the deepest pessimism can we view the recent enlargement of the powers of the Tokyo administration by the municipalisation of the tramways? The only hope lies in a general awakening of public spirit among the citizens, and in the development of the same spirit among the members of the Administration.

W. W. McLaren.