

Citizen Control of the Citizen's Business

TORONTO'S CITIZENS CAN CONTROL TORONTO'S AFFAIRS ONLY THROUGH FREQUENT, PROMPT, ACCURATE AND PERTINENT INFORMATION WITH REGARD TO TORONTO'S BUSINESS.

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THE CITY'S NEXT MUNICIPAL ELECTION

will be held on
JANUARY FIRST

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On that day will be elected 51 men and women who will supervise the expenditure on current account of about \$30,000,000 of the money of the citizens, besides directly or indirectly supervising the expenditure of many millions on capital account. The efficient expenditure of this huge sum requires careful administration and continuity of policy.

We are so afraid that our representatives will go wrong that we prevent them, as far as possible, from going anywhere or at least getting anywhere, by electing the whole membership of Council and Boards every year.

Granted that, for the time being, Toronto citizens can not be persuaded that it is safe to trust a representative two years at a time, is there not anything which can be done, without making radical changes, to promote continuity of policy and to stimulate action throughout the year?

AN EARLIER BUDGET?

Certainly, if the Electors Will Take the Necessary Steps.

Calgary, which holds its municipal elections about the middle of December, completed before the elections the preparation and publication of the draft budget estimates for 1924. This not only enables the voters, before the elections, to get a better idea of the City's business for next year and to learn the views of candidates for or against the proposed budget, but it gives the successful candidates two weeks of intensive study of the draft budget estimates before the meeting in January of the new Council and Boards, which must ratify or revise the draft estimates and establish the tax-rate. It is expected to have Calgary's budget or yearly plan of operations decided and the tax-rate struck by Feb. 15th, instead of some time in May. The official Tax Conference of the municipalities of Alberta has recommended to the Province that draft civic budgets shall in future be completed not later than the first of December preceding the fiscal year affected. All such budgets, before taking effect, must, of course, be ratified by the incoming City Council, the incoming Board of Education, or any other elected Board whose expenditure is met out of taxation.

For ten years the Bureau has urged that similar action be taken in Toronto, and sees no reason to change its views. The proposal to hold the civic elections on the first Monday in December is, of course, a distinctly different proposal; but the two suggestions fit in to one another so well that each should bring support to the other. A draft budget, prepared and printed by December 1st, would give the members of the new Council something to work on during December—informally, it is true, but none the less effectively. It would enable the incoming Council and Boards officially to revise and pass the budget in January of the succeeding year, thus enabling the City to operate under a plan for at least eleven months of the year. The outgoing Council and Boards, after a year's experience, should certainly be more capable of drawing up **draft estimates** for the ensuing year than the new Council and Boards; and the incoming Council and Boards should certainly be more capable of revising the draft budget estimates and **finally adopting the civic budget** in January if they have had one month for previous study of the draft estimates. This would involve no presumption on the part of the old Council and Boards, but would ensure the more careful planning of all the expenditure from the taxpayers' money. All that is needed to bring about the change is co-operation between the Board of Control, the City Council, with its various departments, and the "Outside Boards" whose expenditures affect the tax-rate. Since the Council and Boards exist for the purpose of securing the most and best service possible from the expenditures of the people's money, there should be no difficulty in securing this co-operation if the voters really desire it.

The argument is frequently used that an earlier passing of the budget would enable an earlier payment of the first instalment of taxes, thus effecting a considerable saving in interest payments for money borrowed in anticipation of taxes. This is a valid argument. Care must be taken, however, that the date of the first payment of municipal taxes shall not coincide or nearly coincide with the date of payment of the Dominion Income Tax. The date of the first payment of municipal taxes can hardly be advanced at all without considerable inconvenience to citizens unless it is found possible to advance it to a date not later than March 15th. It is extremely undesirable to heap up tax payments within too short a period.

The main argument for advancing the date of passing the civic budget is to reduce to a minimum that part of the year in which the city operates without a definite plan. No city, no matter how wealthy, can afford to operate without a definite plan for any period longer than that which is absolutely necessary for the revision and passing of the budget by the incoming Council. With proper previous publicity, discussion and consideration, this should not require more than two or three weeks. In so far as an earlier civic election day will make it easier to secure such discussion and consideration, it will contribute to greater continuity of policy, will lengthen the fruitful part of an alderman's or Board member's short annual term, and will facilitate economical administration.

As to the argument that a day other than January first for civic election day will lead to a higher percentage of actual voters among the electors, the Bureau ventures no prophecy. Certainly if an elector wants to vote very much he will, as a general rule, find a way to vote on any day set apart for the purpose; but as to whether a change of date will bring out more voters of the type which hardly cares whether they vote or not, it would be difficult to say before the test is made. After trial for five years, it should be possible to estimate the effect of the change. It must not be forgotten, however, that the number of interested voters may be increased by the greater facilities for public discussion available in the latter part of November as compared with the latter part of December. It seems reasonable to suppose that anything which contributes to livelier public discussion is bound, in the long run, to increase the voting part of the civic electorate, and anything that increases public interest and the number of actual voters can not fail to have a wholesome effect on the civic administration. If such a simple thing as the change of the date of election day can produce results beneficial to the taxpayers, it is surely worth a trial.

If Toronto were being asked to abandon a practice universal throughout the Empire, it would be quite another matter. The news notes on Ontario municipal elections in various Ontario cities held on the first Monday in December, appearing in the press of December 4th, should ease the mind of those most adverse to change, as to the non-revolutionary nature of the proposal.

QUERIES

1. Sometimes when electors go to the polls, they find the name of no one on the ballot for whom they care to vote. Have you assured yourself that you will not have this experience this year?
2. Have you received from each candidate answers to the following questions which vitally affect the welfare of all citizens and taxpayers?

(Questions to Candidates)

- (a). Are you (the candidate) in favour of the preparation and printing of the draft estimates not later than the first week in December, and their revision and passing during January by the incoming Council, and are you in favour of holding the civic election on the first Monday in December in order to facilitate the earlier consideration and adoption of the civic budget estimates?
- (b). Are you in favour of a thorough study of the existing arrangements and customary practices as to employment, promotion, working conditions and administrative control of the personnel of the staffs of the various civic departments and "Outside Boards" whose expenditures affect the tax-rate, with a view to the revision of standardized grades of employment and rates of pay and regulations regarding employment, promotion, transfer and discharge? Should this be done before any civic pension scheme is considered or should a pension scheme be considered first and the improved organization of the civic service afterward? Should it be done before salaries are raised, or should some salaries be raised and the study made afterward?
- (c). Are you in favour of centralized price-getting for the City and all "Outside Boards", based on the most complete co-operation possible between all civic departments and of the City with all "Outside Boards"?
- (d). Are you in favour of the application of the same business and ethical principles in the letting of civic contracts and in the conduct of the City's business affairs in general as are binding on reputable private individuals and firms?
- (e). Are you in favour of a smaller City Council, the members being elected for overlapping terms of two or three years?
- (f). Are you in favour of the abolition of the ward system, so that it will become easier for Councils and Boards to consider all expenditures from the City-wide standpoint?
- (g). Do you believe that any member of an elected body should be eligible for appointment to a paid position in the gift of that body until at least one year had elapsed, after the end of the term for which the member was elected?