

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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Most People Do Not Go to the Physician Until They are Actually Ill.

This policy is coming to be recognized as unintelligent, and more and more people are having regular medical examination so that they may have a chance to forestall illness rather than to fight it after it has become entrenched.

In Municipal and Government affairs comparatively few people are willing to look the facts in the face until conditions are such as to require immediate and drastic treatment. Even clear symptoms of serious disturbance are disregarded, and with dull complaisance a large number, sometimes a large majority, of citizens relax into a self-induced comatose condition so far as public affairs are concerned. The average city will not even take its medicine until in extremis.

THE LATEST BIG CITY TO SEEK A REMEDY FOR ITS ILLS IS CINCINNATI.

It has adopted a City Manager form of government, with a small Council elected at large. For years Cincinnati had had a Council of 32 members who were elected to Council not on account of their ability to give service, but for quite other considerations. If years ago Cincinnati had established a small City Council elected at large even without a City Manager, it is quite unlikely that the following paragraph appearing in a recent bulletin of the Philadelphia Bureau of Municipal Research could have been written truthfully about conditions existing recently in Cincinnati:

"Ohio law limits the taxes a city may levy. Cincinnati had reached the limit. Not since 1915 had ordinary revenue equalled expenditures. Cincinnati citizens, to be sure, might vote additional taxes if they wished; but year after year they had refused to do so (owing to lack of confidence in the spending body). Consequently, operating expenditures had to stand still, assets to wear out, and essential work to be curtailed or badly done. Police-men, nominally paid \$1,500 a year, in 1923 had to take one month's vacation without pay. Streets went without repair and parks without proper maintenance. Health and welfare activities had to be taken over or supplemented by private philanthropy. At the time of the survey, seven million dollars' worth of bonds had been issued for current expenses, and more than twice that amount for improvements that should have been met from taxation."

Apparently Cincinnati did not ask for a diagnosis and accept the prescription until near financial disaster.

Toronto is not and has never been in a condition approaching that described in Cincinnati, but she is not in 100% perfect civic health.

SOME CAUSES OF MUNICIPAL ILL HEALTH.

In the first place the basis of the municipal government is undermined by the prevalence of sleeping sickness among electors. At the recent election it is estimated that only 37.3% of the possible vote for Mayor, 25.3% of the possible vote for Board of Control, 17.2% of the possible vote for Aldermen (after making allowance for acclamation in Ward 1), 15.9% of the possible vote for Board of Education (after making allowance for acclamation in Ward 8), and 33.2% of the possible vote on money by-laws or questions were actually cast. This is the poorest record of efficiency in voting for Mayor and the next to the poorest for Controllers since 1902, previous to which the Bureau has not compiled records. The voting for Aldermen may possibly have been a little poorer in one or two of these years when there were acclamations.

In the second place a tremendous handicap is placed upon the City Council in efficiently controlling policies for the City as a whole and expenditures made under these policies, by the unwieldy size of Council, which puts a premium on government by "gab"; by the undue weight given to ward representation, which is partly responsible for the growth of the local improvement debt; and by a complicated committee system which effectually slows up action when speed is desirable and may be made to facilitate action when action is not at all desirable.

In the third place there are altogether too many independent operating departments preventing by their very machinery the most adequate use of the civic staff, promoting overhead expenditures, and making co-operation

unnecessarily difficult. During the past year there were three opportunities to decrease the number of departments without the dismissal of heads and without ignoring the vested interests of employees, if such vested interests can be said to exist. Not one of these opportunities was seized. Combination made at that time would have automatically increased the application of the principle of centralized purchasing and centralized accounting. But considerations unknown to the Bureau dictated another policy.

In the fourth place the annual estimates, while greatly improved in form over previous practice, are still unstandardized as between departments, with the result that whole groups of facts necessary for effective financial control are entirely lacking.

SOME METHODS OF PREVENTING AND TREATING MUNICIPAL ILL HEALTH.

With mighty labour, reductions in taxation per capita may be made without adopting thorough-going methods of budget making, administrative organization and control of expenditures. It was done last year, and the result was agreeable to the taxpayers and creditable to all concerned, including the responsible heads of departments. It may, and probably will, be done again and perhaps with even greater success. But it will grow harder from year to year to effect any reduction—except a reduction in the tax rate which may or may not be a reduction in taxation—and will finally become absolutely impossible. There is only one effective way of cutting taxation, and that is to spend less money, and there are only two ways of spending less money, i.e., by reducing services or by carrying on existing services at less cost. Toronto is not forced to adopt the former method—yet. She can try first what could be done in reducing cost of existing services. Experience has shown that public bodies spending public funds will do everything to reduce taxation except to spend less money. If they actually did spend less money, in many cases they would lose the support of the people whose money they spend. Most people are willing to have their share of public funds, and as much more as they can manage, spent on projects of direct benefit to them, but fail to realize that the other fellow must and does receive similar treatment. The result is that, instead of anyone getting something for nothing, everyone helps pay for everything, whether everything is really a community need or not.

If this year's City Council wishes to grapple with, rather than agonize over, the reduction of municipal taxation—the desirability of which all people recognize, some preach and few practise—it can give undoubted proof of its desire and determination by:

1. Pressing for provincial legislation to reduce the size of the City Council.
2. Apply for legislation which would abolish wards, or reduce their weight in the City Council.
3. Promote the election of members of Council for longer and overlapping terms.
4. Institute a thorough administrative survey of the personnel of the Civic Service with a view to standardizing positions, equalizing work and pay, establishing rules for appointments, promotions, transfers and dismissals, which will operate toward rewarding merit, building up esprit de corps and making the public service attractive to ambitious young men from stand-points other than that of security of tenure.

5. Inviting and continuing to invite all "Outside Boards" to co-operate with the City in purchasing, to the end that the advantages of centralized purchasing may accrue as far as possible to taxpayers and users of civic services.

6. Abolishing the standing committee system.

7. Standardizing departmental estimates.

London, Ontario, has decided in favour of abolishing the Ward system, reducing the size of Council and electing Aldermen for overlapping terms. The London City Council is said to be considering the advisability of abolishing the committee system.

Do you really believe:

1. That the Ward System is not expensive?
2. That 9 aldermen are not less expensive than 24?
3. That it is easier to get co-operation among 12 departments than 8?
4. That a study of the Civic Service would produce no worthwhile results?
5. That Centralized Purchasing or Price-getting, taking in the City and all "Outside Boards," would save no money for the taxpayer and citizen?
6. That the necessary changes will be made if 100,000 voters stay at home on January 1st?

Can you think of any one thing, entirely irrespective of who will be elected, which would have a more salutary effect on the City Government than a vote of 90 per cent. of the electors entitled to vote, on January 1st, 1926? This would show that the citizens mean business and expect business results. The present small vote may be interpreted as meaning that the average citizen does not mean business and does not expect business results. Hence the sort of results he actually gets and pays for.