

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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From the standpoint of the Public Corporations exist in order to give service.

There are three main types of corporation:

1. Private corporations operating in the competitive field.
2. Privately owned public service corporations whose businesses are monopolistic.
3. Public corporations which usually exercise a complete monopoly in their field.

The charges for services made by the first type are controlled by competition. Those made by the second group are controlled by governmentally appointed boards or by agreement and legislation. The charges made by public corporations, such as the Municipal Corporation, are controlled by the people who pay for the services, as they also are the stockholders who, for the most part, choose the Boards of Directors. That the control by the public over costs of and charges for services exercised in any of these cases is perfect, few would argue.

In which field can the citizens get the most direct and immediate results?

FIRST TYPE.

The control of charges for services by competing private corporations has not been regarded by the citizens of Toronto as within their province except, possibly, in the case of the Civic Abattoir, which was "constructed for the purpose of providing better slaughtering and chill room facilities for the small butcher . . . and sound sanitary conditions under which the work might be carried on," but which may have been continued partly "with a view to supplying meat at a lower price to the consumer**," i.e., to control the price of meats to Toronto consumers, the recurring deficits on the abattoir being regarded as an insurance against possible exploitation by private corporations. As yet the City has not taken out similar insurance against exploitation in the fields of groceries, clothing, furniture, hardware, building supplies, motion pictures, automobiles, gasoline, etc., although the matter has been given some official consideration under one of these heads. Possibly this field of corporation control will not be expanded appreciably unless some system of socialism or communism becomes general.

*p. 670, Appendix A, Council Minutes, 1917.

**Report No. 7 of the Board of Health, p. 707, Appendix A, Council Minutes, 1917.

SECOND TYPE.

Telephone companies are examples of corporations whose charges are subject to the review of a governmental Board. A case under this head has recently been heard. The Board concerned rendered its decision allowing increased rates and the Government has declined to interfere with its decision. The rates charged by gas companies are frequently governed by legislative charter or by agreement or both. Judgment has recently been given by the Privy Council in a case indirectly involving gas rates.

THIRD TYPE.

The municipal corporation of Toronto occupies the whole field within its domain and is an example of the third type. It has no actual or potential competition except the competition for industries and residents offered by other municipal corporations which may be able to promise lower charges for equal services. Where the telephone company collects in the Toronto district annually for its services about \$6,750,000* and the gas company about \$5,300,000**, the municipal corporation collects for services, general and special, other than those of the Hydro and Transportation Commission, concerning whose charges the City Council quite properly has not the deciding voice, about \$32,000,000 annually, of which about \$27,000,000 is general taxation and about \$1,800,000 special taxation.

*Gross receipts as indicated in the Annual Report of the Assessment Department.

**Gas sales, Canadian Securities Manual.

Thus, however important the control of prices charged by privately owned public service corporations may be and ~~are~~ to the citizens, the control of the expenditures made by their own municipal corporation and its agents, and therefore of taxes and other charges for services, ~~are~~ much more important. It is extremely fortunate, therefore, that in this field, where control of charges for services is most important, the citizens can exercise direct and effective control by the choice of able, experienced and effective members to the City Council, Board of Education, and Separate School Board, i.e., their Boards of Directors who directly or indirectly supervise the services, control the expenditures, and fix the charges for services paid for out of taxation and incidental revenue other than taxation.

In the forthcoming municipal election, irrespective of other issues which may be raised, it is therefore advisable to put all candidates on record, particularly on those problems of municipal economy concerning which they may take action without permission of or co-operation by any outside body or authority. Why not ask candidates these and other questions?

1. Should all operating, as distinct from overhead, civic departments be placed under one executive official responsible to Council? If not, why not, in view of increased centralization of purchasing and accounting and more effective use of personnel, which would inevitably result from such co-ordination with accompanying savings and increased service?
2. Should legislation be asked for cutting down the size of the City Council and Board of Education, abolishing the complicated standing committee system, increasing the length of term of Aldermen and Board members, providing for overlapping terms and abolishing wards or reducing their number? If not, why not?
3. In view of the fact that the heads of departments have to all interests and purposes been constituted the personnel department of the city, should standards of age and efficiency for admission to the service be set up definitely and publicly, particularly in view of the movement for a civic pension scheme?
4. If service can be improved or costs reduced, or both, what legitimate excuse can there be for not making the improvements and effecting the reductions, and just what interests, vested or otherwise, stand in the way?
5. Should the field of tax exemptions be narrowly restricted along the lines advocated by the Commissioner of Finance, or should exemption be removed in case of public service commissions only?

6. Can the value of improved real property be preserved for owners and taxpayers by proper zoning and the elimination of the practice of piecemeal and haphazard removal of restrictions? If so, how? If not, why not?
7. Should improvements and the financing of improvements demanding capital expenditure be planned over a term of five or ten years in advance, and should Council establish an Advisory City Planning Committee in this regard which should advise on this and all other matters involving City Planning?
8. Should a policy of setting aside the by-law restricting the height of buildings, whenever a well-financed proposition is in evidence, be adopted without a thorough study of the effects skyscrapers have or may have on:
 - (a) The increase in congestion in the downtown districts.
 - (b) The slowing up of mass and individual transportation.
 - (c) The rigid limitation of individual transportation for business purposes in congested areas and its practical abolition for other purposes except in residential areas.
 - (d) The obsolescence of low buildings in skyscraper districts and their reduction to non-economic operation.
 - (e) The increase of land values in skyscraper districts to such an extent as to make any construction other than skyscraper inadvisable or impossible economically.
 - (f) The rapid approach of the necessity of spending huge sums on subway construction and other rapid transit undertakings possibly in advance of the population necessary to bear the increased burden.
9. Should the Board of Education appoint an Educational Director as the executive head of its educational activities, just as it has appointed a Business Administrator over its business activities?