

# 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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## OPEN LETTER RE VOTING

To the Municipal Electors of Toronto

Ladies and Gentlemen:

**Counters**

In boyhood days, a small fish put on the string, not to be eaten, but to be counted in a contest to see who would get the most fish, was called a "counter".

**What is a vote?**

Webster's unabridged dictionary gives the meaning of vote as "the formal expression of a wish, desire, preference or choice in regard to any measure proposed, especially where the person voting has an interest in common with others, either in electing a person to office or in passing laws, rules, regulations, etc." The casting of a ballot not based on a wish or choice, but based simply on a desire to do one's duty is, therefore, not a real vote; it is a counter and may help to elect a candidate who may conceivably be elected not because the voters know him but because they do not know him. When one says that 60% of the electors voted, he means only that 60% of those entitled to deposit ballots did so. What percentage

of the ballots cast represented real choices or judgments, no one knows or can know.

The really important question is not how many people cast their ballots, but how many people knew what they were doing when they cast their ballots. how many expressed a genuine preference based on knowledge, i.e., **how many people voted.**

The human slot machine.

When a person casts a ballot mechanically, simply because a friend asked him to, or because his conscience bothers him if he doesn't go to the polls, he is performing an act differing little in quality from that of a penny in the slot machine. His ballot will be counted and may result in good or may result in harm. When good results, the elector can claim no credit; when evil results, he can claim no alibi.

Non-combatant electors a real danger.

When there is a large "vote" but a large part of it is uninformed and mechanical, we cannot expect very vital administration. Under ordinary circumstances a small "vote", the greater part of which is the result of information and thought, is much more likely to exercise a positive influence on administration. **But a large uninformed non-voting element is always a potential source of real danger.** Under stress of passion or when special interests find it worthwhile to bring out the dormant vote, the public may suffer, perhaps irretrievably. Again, some representatives of the people may get the idea that they "can get away with anything" in the belief that most people do not really care what happens. Furthermore when there is a small total vote, elections and those elected may be controlled by those electors who have direct personal interests in the expenditure of the taxpayers' money, as these with their friends and connections may be counted on to go to the polls.

The public interests are secure only when a high percentage of the electors cast their ballots on the basis of information and knowledge in order to express a real desire or preference; in other words, **when the majority of potential voters are actual voters.**

Of those casting ballots at a municipal election, how many are really voters and how many "counters"? Of the "counters", how many are potential voters?

People vote when they are conscious of an issue.

It has been said that people vote when there is an issue. It might be said more correctly that most people vote when they know that there is an issue. For there is always an issue and an important issue. If the selection of the men and women who are to control and supervise the expenditure on current account annually, of \$33,500,000, to manage a plant worth \$200,000,000 and to set the rate of taxation on assessed values of \$922,000,000 does not constitute a live issue, what does? Yet,

allowing for 33 1-3% duplication in the voting lists, at least 5 in 10 do not vote for Mayor, and 6 out of every 10 do not vote for Controller. About 7 out of every 10 do not vote for Aldermen, and 8 out of every 10 do not vote for Member of the Board of Education. Possibly if the amount of duplication within ward voting lists were known, the record for Aldermanic and Board of Education voting would be slightly better than this.

If the permanent issue already mentioned does not stimulate practical interest, how would these others do?

Some other real issues.

1. Would results be better if the size of Council and Board of Education were cut down?
2. Would it be possible to get better candidates and get better service from successful candidates if the term were extended from one year to three?
3. Would there be greater continuity of policy if only one-third of the City Council and Board of Education retired each year?
4. Would it be better to elect at large rather than by ward, or would decreasing the number of wards help?
5. Would "one man one vote", a result which presumably would be brought about automatically by the abolition of wards, be desirable?
6. Should the number of civic departments be reduced?
7. Should the date of holding municipal elections be changed?
8. Should the civic estimates be passed tentatively in November or December, subject to confirmation by the new Council?
9. If the number of candidates to be elected each year were to be cut down, if better types of candidates in greater numbers resulted from longer and overlapping terms, if the changes increased municipal efficiency, if the tentative civic estimates—current and capital—were made available to the public in November or December and if candidates declared their positions as to this tentative budget, would interest be created and the number of "counters" and non-voters be reduced?

Why not put all candidates on record on these or any other issues you have in mind?

Yours very sincerely,

BUREAU OF MUNICIPAL RESEARCH,

Walter J. Barr - - - President  
Horace L. Brittain - - - Director



## QUESTION TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE ELECTORS ON JANUARY 1st, 1929.

"Are you in favor of changing the date of holding the Municipal Elections from January 1st to the first Monday in December?"

In a letter of April, 1928, to the Mayor and at the recent conference at the City Hall on the subject, the Bureau made its position clear that causes much more fundamental than the date of voting affected the size of the vote at municipal elections, and that anything which would add to the real interest of citizens would help bring out the vote, as issues regarded as important have done in the past. The Bureau has no objection whatever to people voting on any day they may choose, but facts from other cities which have tried change of date, so far as these were available to the Bureau, do not seem to warrant any great hope of appreciable improvement by this method. The Bureau therefore did not feel warranted, in view of available facts, to support a change of date without submission of the question to the people's decision. The Bureau fears that if any change in date is not immediately followed up by fundamental changes in the municipal organization for conducting public business and in the attitude of the public to its own business, a great disappointment will almost certainly be the result. Irrespective of what this decision may be, the Bureau will continue to place before the people of Toronto the advantages of certain changes which it has suggested for many years—changes calculated to improve the efficiency of the legislative and policy-forming service and therefore to increase the interest of the electors and their participation in municipal elections.

Some of these have been outlined in question form on page 3 of this bulletin. These are:

1. The election of members of Council for three-year overlapping terms.
2. The abolition of the standing committee system as at present existing.
3. The reduction of the size of Council.
4. The abolition of wards or the election at large of more than half of the City Council.
5. The presentation of a tentative current budget in December, subject to confirmation by the incoming Council of the following year.