

BUREAU OF MUNICIPAL RESEARCH

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

137 WELLINGTON ST. W.
TELEPHONE EL. 1904



TORONTO
CANADA

White Paper No. 244

November 9th, 1939

On the First Day of January, 1940

the electors of the City of Toronto are to elect 50 men and women to supervise the expenditure out of taxation and general fund of about \$36½ millions and the services that this sum buys.

In addition there is the expenditure of the Water Works Department of over \$3 millions and the authorizations of expenditure out of debenture funds, affecting general taxation which has varied in the period 1924 to 1939 from about \$1½ millions to over \$21 millions or an average of about \$6 millions annually.

IMPORTANCE OF MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Not only are the sums involved important, at least it would have been so regarded in a former age, but they buy for the citizens essential services, most of which could not be obtained by the citizens individually unless at great expense and with great difficulty.

It is particularly important at the 1940 civic election to choose able and public-spirited representatives because possibly they will serve for a two-year term instead of a one-year term as in recent years, so that they may have the supervision of the expenditure of about \$80 millions out of current revenues and an unknown amount out of borrowed funds.

OUR PAST RECORD

We, as electors, must display much more vital interest at the 1940 civic election than we did at the 1939 election. Then 154,458 individuals voted out of a possible of say 300,000. Many of these individuals only exercised a fraction of their franchise. Some did not vote for Mayor. Probably many more voted for Mayor only. Some voted for only one Board of Control candidate. Some for only one Aldermanic or Board of Education candidate or for none of them at all. About, say, 33% of the total possible vote for Board of Education was cast in the wards where there were contests, about 33% for aldermen, about 35% for control and 49% for mayor. Even if these are under-estimates, the record is not one of which we can be proud or with which we can safely rest content.

An analysis of the figures tends to show that the failure to appreciate the importance of municipal voting was not confined to any particular type of citizen. There is little or no reason to believe that families of property owners made any better record than families of leaseholders or families of those who qualified as voters on a business assessment. There is no reason to believe that the so-called "relief vote" and "City Hall vote" would show a preponderating influence if the total vote were 80% of the possible vote.

WHAT IS REQUIRED NOW

It is quite evident that what is required is the exercise of the franchise by all who have it. The exercise of the franchise does not mean simply voting on January first for candidates chosen by special interests or by themselves. It means taking a part in the selection of candidates, an activity which should begin now. One reason for the small vote is the fact that would-be voters are frequently confronted at the polls by names of candidates whom they don't know or know too well and no names which inspire confidence.

If a two-year term would result in a greater number of qualified candidates and a greater number of determined voters it would be justified. Now is the time to demonstrate what the electors can do.

Local institutions are the foundation of democracy. If the people neglect them, increased centralization will suppress them. This is a law of life. Observe what has happened to municipal institutions in totalitarian states.

THE VOTERS ARE NOT HELPLESS

If voters can do nothing individually, they can through organization. If not, why do others organize?

The quality of government is determined by the quality of those who vote and the number of those who do not vote. Sometimes the latter decides.

For twenty-five years the Bureau of Municipal Research has maintained a service of independent fact-telling and suggestions to the citizens and taxpayers of Toronto. Under present conditions it is impossible for an individual, unaided, to devote the time necessary to keep in touch with the actual tendencies in municipal affairs. The Bureau offers a real opportunity to citizens to co-operate effectively in civic government by helping to maintain an independent fact-finding agency of constructive criticism which is so necessary for citizen control of the citizens' business.