

# 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. 245*

*December 8th, 1939*

## IN PEACE

it makes a real difference whether or not there is economy and efficiency in municipal government.

## IN WAR

waste and inefficiency in municipal administration are disloyal to the national cause because they divert resources from national defence. Any one who condones and does not combat waste and inefficiency in effect gives aid and comfort to the enemy.

---

### STORY NUMBER I

Does the Form of Civic Organization Make  
any Difference ?

## DOES THE FORM OF CITY GOVERNMENT MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE?

"The Form of Our Municipal Government is All Right  
If the Voters Are Really Interested in Civic Affairs."

This statement is frequently heard and is sound so far as it asserts that the interest of the voters in civic affairs is basal to good municipal government and that anything the voters want, if sufficiently interested, they can have. If it means that the present machinery supplies an efficient means by which the voters can control their municipal affairs, or that it does not discourage citizen interest, it is far from correct.

### THE VOTERS ARE NOT HELPLESS.

As a matter of fact the efficiency of civic machinery and the interest of the voters are very closely connected. Many voters say that they have ceased to vote because they feel that, with the present set-up, exercising the franchise is of little or no use. When a determined man in doing a job finds himself handicapped with inadequate tools and equipment, what does he do? He procures the proper tools and equipment. That is what the voters can do. If they think the present civic machinery is inadequate, they can procure machinery that is adequate. If the present legislation is insufficient, they can, if they wish, procure special legislation.

The best way to get a lead as to what changes should be made is to study commonly heard and often repeated judgments as to municipal affairs. There is usually an element of truth at least in such statements. Among these may be listed the following:

1. Municipal affairs frequently just drift along without observable planning for the future.
2. Loyalty to the city as a whole, rather than sectional loyalty, is not a sufficiently marked feature of civic political life in Toronto.
3. The records of many members of the City Council and of other elected bodies are not sufficiently marked by independence of judgment and courageous and persistent action.
4. Time is often wasted in Council by discussion of petty or irrelevant details.
5. The City Council is dominated by the Board of Control to such an extent that the value of the functions of aldermen is greatly impaired.
6. The calibre of candidates offering themselves for election to civic office is not always as high as it should be.
7. It is difficult to get information as to the education, training and experience of candidates.

#### 1. Lack of Planning for the Future.

It has been said by visiting observers that Toronto as a whole gives the impression of having grown up without real town planning, although there is evidence of careful planning in some districts. It has also been said that, although a large city, it is lacking, except in one or two possible instances, in streets of real distinction. This, even if true, is not due entirely to the

lack of a City Planning and Housing Commission, the formation of which is long overdue, but to the fact that members of the city's representative bodies are almost compelled to think in one-year periods by the fact that all elections are for one-year terms. The symbol of municipal life in Toronto is, so to speak, a string of beads without a string. Each year is an entity in itself; and, even if three-quarters of a Council's members are re-elected to a new Council, psychologically each year is a new year. The 1st of January in one year has no relation to the 31st of December of the preceding year except that it is the day after. It is the beginning of a new series. The attitude is "let the dead past bury its dead", which would not be so bad if it were in practice followed by "Act, act in the living present". To secure a readjustment of attitude toward future planning the logical change would be the substitution of a three-year term for a one-year term in Council, as in England. Abrupt changes in policy could be guarded against by "staggering" terms, one-third of Council retiring each year, the Mayor being elected annually.

#### 2. Loyalty to Toronto.

Sectionalism is a great foe of real democracy as well as of efficient management in Canada, no matter which of the three levels of government is considered. The ward system in different countries has different effects according to the political habits of the citizens and the degree of development of the committees concerned. In Canada, where many cities are in a condition of comparatively rapid development, and where business makes insistent demands on most people, there is little doubt that the ward system aggravates sectionalism, adds greatly to the cost of government, and promotes a particularly "small" brand of local politics. The currency of such terms as "ward politics" and "ward politician" is not without significance.

The natural way out is the election-at-large of a majority of Council and the cutting down of the number of wards for the election of the remainder. Some say that the cost of this system to the candidates would be prohibitive, but this would be offset by the fact that lengthening the term of office from one to two or three years would reduce the number of elections for the candidates half or two-thirds.

#### 3. Independence of Judgment, Courageous and Persistent Action by Members of Council.

The one-year term is an excellent device to slow a man up and tends to keep him from doing anything wrong. It also, by the same token, tends to keep him from doing anything, either right or wrong. With a three-year term a man who wishes to continue in Council can give three months at the beginning to "learning the ropes", six months at the end to "mending his fences" and two months each year to vacation, and still have twenty-one months left for independent public service without too great fear of special interests or sectional public opinion.

The one-year term plays into the hands of special interests who wish to control council members. It, of course, permits voters to retire men at the end of one year. But no man can show in one year what he can do, and if the three-year term makes the voters more careful in the choice of candidates, it will result in great public advantage. A "nod is often as good as a kick". Those who do not come up for election will observe what happened to those who do and will govern themselves accordingly. After all, members of federal

and provincial parliaments are elected in practice for four or five-year terms, even without the safeguard of "staggered" terms giving the people an annual opportunity to express their will. Such an opportunity as is offered by the staggered term not only provides a healthy check on Council but promotes active citizenship. With a three-year staggered system, two-thirds of Council are not confronted in any one year by the worry and work of an election. With a three-year non-staggered system, all members of Council are faced by an election on the third year. With a two-year "staggered" term for aldermen and a one-year term for mayor, the majority of Council could be replaced each year.

#### 4. Waste of Time in Council Sessions.

IF large topics were always given first place on the agenda of City Councils, IF City Council were not dominated by the Board of Control, IF membership in Council attracted more first-rate minds, IF the term of office were long enough to demonstrate efficiency, IF Council confined itself to community planning, to the settlement of civic policies, to a consideration of the civic budget and budget control, and to the appointment and supervision of heads of independent departments, the apparent waste of time in Council should largely disappear.

#### 5. Domination of Council by the Board of Control.

As long as the majority of Council is elected by wards, so long will it be necessary in the public interest to maintain the special powers of the Board of Control, which is elected at large. So great, however, is the present domination, that one often hears the question, "What is the good of having aldermen in the City Council"? It is possible that the city would have had as good, as economical, as efficient and as democratic government during the last decade if the members of the Board had constituted the whole Council. For example, rarely does Council modify significantly the annual budget as it comes in draft form from the Board. The policy of the Board usually prevails in all important matters, and where it does not, who is to say that the Board was wrong and Council right?

The Committees of Council probably discharge a useful function in initiating and discussing policies. But they would probably provide better service if they had a greater share in determining important policies and making important decisions. If the majority of Council were elected at large there would be no need of a Board with special authority and powers and not appointed by and therefore not responsible to Council, and Committees of Council would be almost at once revitalized.

#### 6. Candidates Not of Sufficient Calibre.

Those who have observed carefully for some years, seem to hold the opinion that in general candidates for public offices are at least as intelligent, public-spirited and capable as the electorate. In any event, the electorate gets about what it deserves, or better. The first requisite in getting out candidates of more than average capacity is to create conditions which will encourage such candidates to offer their services. The personalities and abuse of a civic election, the existence of a term of office so short as to make demonstration of fitness impossible, a ward system which puts a premium on the "glad-hander" certainly do not offer strong inducements to worthy citizens to become civic candidates.

The second requisite is a continuing citizen organization which will support able candidates at election time and able representatives throughout the year. There is always co-operation in government. It is either co-operation for personal or private ends or co-operation in the general interests. It is always easy to organize and keep organized co-operation of the first sort. In fact, it almost organizes itself. Organization of the second sort is more difficult to initiate; but once started, demands only a small investment of time if all do their share.

#### 7. Information as to Candidates.

This is easy to get if the voters' organization is determined to get it. A short biographical note of each candidate, even without stating preference, would be a great help to voters. If preferences are stated, the assistance is even greater. The absence of such a biographical note in the case of any candidate neglecting to supply information would also be illuminating to voters.

#### EXTRACTS FROM PREVIOUS WHITE PAPERS.

May 16, 1935.

"An(other) American usage which has crossed the border is the practice of electing the whole City Council every year. In England councillors are elected for three years and one-third retire annually. These councillors, in turn, choose a certain number of aldermen who serve for six years. This enables a certain measure of continuity to be given to municipal policy. In the United States, on the other hand, the idea of short terms, as a means of ensuring popular accountability, gained nation-wide vogue half a century or more ago, and Canadian cities were unwise enough to fall in with the procession. Most of them still maintain the practice of electing councillors for a one-year term, although the plan of annual election was found to work badly in American cities and has now been abandoned by nearly all of them."

WILLIAM BENNETT MUNRO,  
in the Marfleet Lectures, Toronto, 1929.  
White Paper No. 205.

November 19, 1935.

"There is no principle of government more thoroughly established by long experience than that capable men will not give their time to service on any public body unless it is sufficiently clothed with power."

WILLIAM BENNETT MUNRO  
in the Marfleet Lectures.

Under the existing legislation, the City Council may not, without a two-thirds majority of Council—

1. Award a contract to a tenderer other than the one to whom the Board has awarded it (R.S.O. 233, Sec. 221, s.s. (5)), even to a lower tenderer however financially responsible, competent or ethical he may be.
2. Appoint a department head other than the one named by the Board of Control.
3. Reinstate a department head dismissed by the Board of Control.

This means that even if 15 aldermen out of 18 wish to award a contract to a tenderer, even the lowest, other than the one selected by the Board of Control, or appoint a head of a department other than the Board nominee or reinstate a department head dismissed by the Board, they are helpless to enforce their will in face of a unanimous Board of Control. A majority of Council is sufficient to refer back, but Aldermen must vote 12 to 6 to refer back a question reported on by the Board of Control, unless some Controller votes with them, in order to make their opinion prevail. And yet the taxpayers of Toronto are paying this year in aldermanic salaries \$21,272.

Could Aldermen give better service if their opinions counted for more in deciding civic politics? If so, would more candidates and more capable candidates then offer their services?

Why not a small Council with equal voting power for its numbers?

White Paper No. 210.

June 11, 1935.

"In England councillors are elected for three-year terms and one-third retire (and are elected) annually . . . American city councillors are now elected in almost all cases for terms of two, three or four years, with provision for a partial renewal of Council each year. This enables a combination of longer terms with continuity. It is hard to understand why the one-year term should be retained in Canadian cities when it is not found (except sporadically) anywhere else, the world over."

WILLIAM BENNETT MUNRO  
Marfleet Lectures, 1929.  
White Paper No. 206.