

# 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.

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TORONTO  
CANADA

*White Paper No. 246*

*December 26th, 1939*

## OPEN LETTER

### Re. "Questions," City Elections, January 1st, 1940

To the Electors of the City of Toronto:

Between 1932 and 1938 the total net debenture debt of Toronto decreased from \$172,000,062 to \$129,560,246, or \$42,439,816. Other important decreases have been made this year. This should not be regarded as an invitation to retrace our steps and to build up our debenture debt again to "magnificent" proportions. After the not too happy period of the last ten years, is it an entirely foolish idea that the taxpayer might be given a breathing space by confining all proposed capital expenditures to essentials, at least until the end of the war?

As a matter of fact more than half the reduction in debenture debt was in public utility debt and, owing to short-term direct unemployment relief debentures, there was actually an increase in debt charges affecting taxation between 1932 and 1938.

The failure to appreciate fully that there is really a war which involves a life or death struggle for the right to maintain representative institutions and the right to vote, among other things, on money by-laws, is perhaps explainable by the general undramatic nature of hostilities so far.

## WAR FINANCING SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT OF WAY.

It is difficult to understand, however, how anyone who reads the papers or listens to the radio could fail to be disturbed by a proposal which would involve going into the same bond market, from which the Federal Government will be forced to draw many millions of dollars, for a purpose not based on the requirements of the health and safety of the population which has to supply the sinews of war. The recent announcement of the Federal authorities that individual loans exceeding \$4,000 under the National Housing Act will not be granted, indicates that the Government feels the necessity of restricting public borrowing for purposes other than the war. The building of houses is surely as important as the construction of traffic arteries.

It is also difficult to understand how any proposal could be made which must divert men and materials from our maximum war effort in the interests of our safety and liberty, except for a purpose also vital to our safety. **The main public issue at present is the successful prosecution of the war and any municipal policy which might interfere with this should not be considered for a moment.**

Most men and women over 40 years of age can remember the huge employment dislocation which came at the end of the last war. It was pointed out at that time that the country should have and could have been ready to take up the employment slack, at least in part, if there had been adequate planning previously. This could hardly have been expected, human nature being what it is, in the light of the fact that we had had no previous experience with after-war conditions. **But now we have had such experience and we know that it is only common sense to have available after the war, for immediate use, well-planned programmes of valuable public work, particularly provincial and municipal, in order that displaced war workers may again be caught up, and at once, into the business and industrial life of the country.**

Two questions involving money by-laws are to be submitted on January first next. These are discussed below.

### 1. Sewage Treatment and Disposal Question.

"Are you in favour of providing a plant for the treatment and disposal of sewage in the City of Toronto, and anything necessary or appurtenant thereto, at an estimated cost to the City of \$5,600,000?"

The Board of Review, Majority Report, states that "in our opinion the need for adequate sewage disposal is unquestioned". With this the Minority Report agrees. No one can read these reports without a feeling that we have had a fortunate escape in the past and that it would involve too great risk of public health to postpone action which should have been taken long ago.

It should be borne in mind that the present proposal is only for one stage, which may possibly, but not probably, offer a satisfactory solution. According to the press of Dec. 7th, the Hon. Harold J. Kirby is quoted as warning

the City Council that the Provincial Government would refuse to accept construction of a \$5,600,000 sewage disposal plant as a final solution to Toronto's sewage problem. His letter is quoted as containing the following paragraph:

"In recognition of conditions resulting from the war"\* we are prepared to approve this project only on the assurance that the City will undertake to construct the remaining stage of the complete treatment plant, in a manner satisfactory to this department, not later than four years subsequent to the completion of the first stage of the disposal works."

The construction of the complete plant recommended in the Majority Report would involve an expenditure of at least \$3,900,000 more, so that the question may not and probably will not involve \$5,600,000 only but \$9,500,000, the figure set in the Majority Report for the cost of a complete treatment. If the additional expenditure should prove to be necessary should it not have the right of way over all other proposed capital expenditures for purposes however useful, if not vital to health and safety? **All facts and expert opinion available to the Bureau, call for the passage of the above question on sewage treatment and disposal.**

\*(The bold face type is the Bureau's.)

### 2. Traffic Artery Question.

"Are you in favour of constructing a traffic artery to connect Jarvis Street with Mount Pleasant Road and improved street railway and traffic arteries from Dupont Street to St. Clair Avenue, substantially in accordance with plans filed with the City Clerk, to be paid for by the City at large, and to be carried out over an approximate period of four years, at an estimated cost of \$5,600,000?"

If the words had been added "actual construction not to begin until after the war", exception to the by-law might have been limited to the following grounds:

1. Two projects are involved and they should have been set forth in separate questions.
2. **No assurance is given to the electors as a result of drawing up a city-wide plan, that the two proposals are the best which might be offered.** They are apparently two distinct projects without reference to a city-wide plan.

It is not enough to say casually that after the plan is approved, it will not be proceeded with until circumstances warrant.

The passing on the principle only of the proposed traffic artery by-laws now would enable all the preliminary arrangements to be made for execution at the end of the war when many men will find themselves out of employment. The electors, however, have not been given the opportunity of passing on the

question with the proviso that actual construction should not begin until the conclusion of the war. There can be no argument as to the need for a city-wide plan to relieve traffic congestion, among other things. The first thing to do, however, is to ensure, by winning the war, that there will be need for additional traffic arteries after the war.

In addition to the questions relating to money by-laws are two questions as to municipal voting, as follows:

- (1) "Are you in favour of suspending the municipal elections in Toronto for the duration of the present war?"
- (2) "Are you in favour of changing the term of office of Mayor, Controllers and Aldermen from a one-year to a two-year period?"

One might be in favour of suspending municipal elections for a two-year period, and be violently opposed to their suspension for the period of the war. We might save some money by so doing, but we might and probably would lose many times more through administration by an irresponsible Council. Besides, if we are going to save money, are there not many ways of saving much more without any offsetting danger?

The Bureau has long supported a definite two-year term for aldermen staggered so that continuity of membership would be assured. It feels that an experiment with the straight two-year term is entirely worth while and that it would prove to be a great improvement over the present system. It believes, however, that at the end of the war, a two-year "staggered" term should be set up with a one-year term for Mayor. By this system, the electors might every year, if they wished, replace a majority of Council. The annual election of the Mayor would help to ensure a large vote.

Respectfully submitted,

*T. G. ROGERS,*

*President.*

*HORACE L. BRITTAIN,*

*Managing Director.*

We are engaged in a war which may become a "total" war. All our resources should be used so as to ensure victory with as little economic disturbance as possible after the war. Avoidable public expenditure unnecessarily accentuates the "boom" in employment in war time and diminishes the possibility of grappling effectively with after-the-war conditions of dislocation.