

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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OPEN LETTER

TO THE CITIZENS AND TAXPAYERS
OF TORONTO

Qualifications for Municipal Public Office

There are two main aspects of public business:

1. Deciding on public policies.
2. Carrying out public policies.

Naturally those designated to carry on these public functions require different qualifications. In Canadian practice those assigned to deciding on public policies are elected by the public. They are the trustees of the public. Those who are assigned to carrying out public policies are appointed by the trustees of the public.

Speaking not in legal but in general terms, what are the chief qualifications for one seeking assignment to a policy-forming, i.e., an elective position in the municipal service?

In the first place he does not need to be an expert in any single realm of knowledge or line of endeavour, but he does need to know—

1. How to use the advice of experts and specialists in deciding on policies.
2. How to preserve his independence of special interests.
3. How to pursue a policy he believes in the public interest until it is given a trial.

He does not need any qualities that an ordinary citizen should not have, although he should have the necessary qualities in greater degree in so far as public business is on so large a scale and is of such vital importance to many people. An ordinary man does not need to be a doctor or lawyer or architect or engineer in order to discharge his duties to his family. He needs to know how to select a doctor or a lawyer or an architect or an engineer, to weigh advice, and profit by it. So a controller or alderman does not need to be an expert in medicine, law, architecture, engineering or any other profession represented in the public service, but he needs to be able to size up the qualifications of a Medical Officer of Health, a City Solicitor, a Commissioner of Buildings, a City Engineer, a Fire Chief, an Abattoir Commissioner, a Street Cleaning Commissioner, a Parks Commissioner, a T.T.C. Commissioner, a Hydro Commissioner, a Harbour Commissioner, etc. to weigh their advice and profit by it.

Being an expert in some one line, of course, may be indirectly a benefit, in that it may help a member of an elected body to appreciate the value of expertness in civic employees. As a matter of fact, they need to be specialists in only one line. They need to be specialists in getting elected. A would-be alderman who does not get elected is not an alderman and cannot be of much service in this respect, either to the City or to himself.

QUALIFICATIONS OF OFFICIALS WHO CARRY OUT POLICIES

In the City government alone, not including the Board of Education, the Separate School Board, the Public Library, the Hydro, the Transportation Commission or the Harbour Commission, sixteen heads of departments are responsible for carrying out policies, fourteen of them for carrying out policies of the Board of Control and City Council.

It should go without saying that no one should be appointed as head of an administrative department, unless fully qualified by technical training and professional experience to administer the department concerned. This principle has been well established in some cases by law, custom or both. For instance no one would think of appointing as head of the Health Department anyone but a professional medical man* with special training and experience in public health administration any more than one would think of calling in a carpenter to treat his child for a broken leg. No one

*Of course, by law, the Medical Officer of Health must be a "legally qualified medical practitioner."

would think of appointing anyone but a solicitor and barrister, with special training and experience in municipal law, at the head of the civic law department. The same principle should be observed in appointing a head for any civic department. It would take too long to list the requirements for all appointments of civic commissioners, but it will be sufficient for illustrative purposes to do so for one department only.

If, for example, the city were faced by the necessity of appointing a Commissioner of Finance, what qualifications should the Board of Control and City Council look for? These, among others—

1. Thorough technical training and long experience in finance, including public credit, foreign exchange, etc.
2. Thorough technical training and long experience in appropriation control.
3. Thorough technical training and long experience in methods of collection of accounts, taxes, etc.
4. Thorough technical training and long experience in accounting administration and control.
5. Ability to write public reports and give advice to the Board of Control and City Council, so as to make the finance department of the greatest assistance in civic administration.
6. Ability to present to the citizens and taxpayers reports on financial topics in such a way as to increase public understanding of and interest in civic affairs.
7. The professional rather than the political approach to departmental problems.

It should also be borne in mind that the principle of promotion in the service should be observed in the interest of esprit de corps and efficiency in all departments of the civic service. Only very special circumstances or an emergency can justify departure from this principle. After three incumbencies of the office by commissioners selected from outside the service, there should be some one in the department fully competent to fill the office. If there is not, it constitutes a grave criticism of past administrations. The Bureau has good reason to believe, however, that there is, and that if an appointment is made of one now outside the department, it will be for reasons other than the welfare of the citizens and taxpayers. An otherwise excellent appointment from outside the service may, and frequently does, start a precedent with untoward results. It was said of Napoleon's army, as an explanation of its quality, that every soldier carried a marshal's baton in his knapsack. Every employee of the City should feel that he may reach the head of his profession or calling in the civic service. This would be the best guarantee of quality of civic personnel throughout.

The appointment of members of elected bodies to permanent administrative positions in the civic service, while sometimes apparently not leading to bad results, is extremely dangerous and should not be countenanced.

For over a quarter of a century the Bureau of Municipal Research has maintained a watch tower in the interests of citizens and taxpayers. Its services have been limited by the extent of the financial and moral support given to it. Its services were never more needed. Each citizen may think that alone he or she cannot do much. Co-operative effort supplies the key to effective action.