

BUREAU OF MUNICIPAL RESEARCH

Monthly



Letter

137 WELLINGTON STREET WEST, TORONTO

OPEN LETTER

VOTING

Citizens of Toronto:

The Corporation of the City of Toronto is a cooperative venture to obtain for us as citizens, services which we could not as well or as cheaply obtain individually. Each year it spends (with the School Boards) almost \$45 million not including the public utilities operated by commissions. It produces therefore, such services as police protection and crime prevention, fire protection and fire prevention, street cleaning, garbage collection and incineration, protection of public health (including food and milk inspection), education, recreation and help for the "under-privileged"; it provides our sewers and sewage disposal, water, streets and sidewalks; and we pay the bill, either directly or indirectly, as taxpayers.

As a citizen of Toronto, you will have on January 1st. a clear opportunity to express your will and make it effective so far as the Government of this city is concerned. Once the polls have closed, the city's business is entrusted to the representatives elected by your vote and mine, stimulated by personal contacts or letters from interested citizens throughout the year. Our interest in civic affairs and our influence on legislation should not stop on January 1st. Nevertheless nomination and voting are the first basic responsibilities of citizenship.

The vote is an inalienable right, won by centuries of striving and sacrifice. It is the hall-mark of a true democracy, and any interference whatever with the liberty of the individual in recording his personal choice or decision strikes at the foundations of freedom. It is equally true that if the citizen on whom such a privilege is conferred neglects to cast his ballot, he is ignoring one of the first principles of democracy. In Toronto today, the greatest interference with the use of the ballot lies in the apathy of many of the citizens. The citizen must not complain if his interests are adversely affected by decisions which he could in some degree have influenced by his vote, and by a more active and informed interest in civic affairs. In fact, history shows that if the franchise is not exercised it is ultimately lost.

No man would think of dispensing with the manifold services of the city although many an individual accepts them as unconsciously as the air he breathes. Yet if city services were to stop for a week, civilized life, as he knows it, would cease.

The Services rendered by the local authorities touch him "where he lives" in a sense that Provincial and Dominion services do not, more intimately and to a greater extent. The City of Toronto spends more than seven of the nine provinces. It spends over \$267 for each family for vitally important services. This represents a very large item in the cost of living (for a family with \$2,000 income, \$360 might possibly be devoted to shelter).

Yet at the last civic election only 36% of the possible votes were cast for Mayor, just over 25% were cast for Controllers, and in the wards where elections were held, only slightly more than 26 out of each 100 possible were cast for an alderman and slightly less for a member of the Board of Education.

Surely shareholders in a corporation which has assets in excess of \$82,000,000 and which spends annually \$45,000,000 of the citizens' money on civic services should bestir themselves in selecting those who are to act as trustees for them.

It is too late to help selecting candidates. Perhaps you have already done so. But it is not too late to choose between candidates whom others have selected or who have selected themselves. It is not too late to ask them pertinent or even impertinent questions.

Yours respectfully,

J. G. Rogers
President

Eric Andy
Managing Director

December 17th, 1947.