

Open Letter Issued by the Bureau of Municipal Research, 24 Isabella Street, Toronto 5



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An independent fact-finding organization  
reporting to the public on civic affairs.

# CIVIC AFFAIRS

February 8, 1952

## MUNICIPAL ORGANIZATION FOR THE CITY

Fellow Citizens:

The story of local government in Toronto is full of contrasts. In recent years Toronto has set up a housing authority and is talking now of a new commission to manage parking areas. When emergency housing became troublesome, control was given under contract to a private operator. While succeeding Councils have shifted the responsibility for particular services to outside bodies, the council and school board structure itself has rarely undergone amendment. A ten year development ending in 1906 gave us the Board of Control system in its present form. Since then, the only notable innovation was a reduction, in 1933, in the number of aldermen from three to two per ward. The change resulted in a smaller Council and meant, moreover, that a higher proportion of its members were elected at large.

The stability of our municipal structure over forty-five years would be cause for congratulation if all could agree that the present organization of the City Council and the Board of Education promotes harmony and effective accomplishment. But the Bureau is forced to think otherwise. Aside from the inevitable shortcomings of personalities, it sees certain weaknesses in the system as such. The Board of Education has some doubts also about the merits of its own set-up. At the present time, steps are being taken to obtain authority to pay the trustees, and other changes are being considered.

Rep. by Pop.

Under the present system of Council and school board representation, one thing that is long overdue is an adjustment of ward boundaries. Year by year the populations of some City wards have been shrinking, while others have grown substantially. Based on preliminary returns from the 1951 Census, we find today some startling variations. The figures on the following page tell the story.

		<u>Population</u>		<u>Variation from Average</u>
Ward 1	--	76,076	--	1,527 over
2	--	65,439	--	under 9,110
3	--	38,053	--	under 36,496
4	--	68,033	--	under 6,516
5	--	91,933	--	17,384 over
6	--	122,425	--	47,876 over
7	--	52,129	--	under 22,420
8	--	85,095	--	10,546 over
9	--	71,762	--	under 2,787

If the smallest ward (3) is entitled to two representatives on the Board of Education and two on the Council as at present, the largest ward (6) should in all fairness be allowed six members on each of these bodies.

In 1948, the City Council created a special committee to study and recommend adjustments in ward boundaries. This committee held a series of meetings extending over several months. At the year-end agreement had not yet been reached among its own members and, when the chairman met defeat in the annual elections, the committee was not continued.

The special committee had quickly accepted the necessity for equalizing ward populations. The problem on which it was stubbornly divided was the shape the new wards should take. The present Ward 3 extends from the waterfront as far north as the old Belt Line Railway, a distance of fully four miles. On the other hand, it ranges in width between one-third and three-quarters of a mile. Wards 2, 4, 5 and 6 have a similar elongated shape. Within the committee, a solid majority wanted to do away with these "strip" wards, as they are called, and to lay out nine "block" wards shaped more like the present Ward 8. Press comment, however, took up the minority viewpoint in favour of retaining the "strip" wards with slight boundary adjustments, and this situation doubtless contributed to the committee's quiet demise.

One reason the ward boundary problem has remained unsettled is the uncertain outcome of the amalgamation issue. In May of last year, the last of eighty-five witnesses appeared before the Ontario Municipal Board; opposing counsel presented their final arguments, and the Board settled down to the job of sifting the thousands of words of written and verbal evidence placed before it. But now, as the time for a report draws closer, problems of municipal organization should receive renewed attention. Whether Toronto proper is to retain its present boundaries or to be merged in a larger city, an efficient municipal structure is sorely needed. And, under either circumstance, a progressive type of city government should, we believe, include the same essential features.

#### The Board of Control System

The method of government which has been accepted in Toronto for so many years hinges on the strong position given to the Board of Control and its individual members in the conduct of city business. One controller and the mayor ex-officio sit on each standing committee of Council. The Board of Control reviews all standing committee reports before they are presented to Council. The Board, itself, serves as a central executive committee, as the standing committee on finance, and deals with questions not assigned to any standing or special committee. In the Council, its five members have equal voting rights with the eighteen aldermen, but it takes a two-thirds majority to overrule the Board's decisions on senior departmental appointments and on the letting of tenders, or to authorize expenditures not recommended by the Board.

Here are some of the strong and weak points of the present system:

Advantages

1. Election of the mayor and the four controllers at large ensures spokesmen for the city-wide viewpoint at all stages of the civic deliberations. The strategic position these members hold requires a strong combination of ward aldermen to override their wishes.
2. The need to coordinate the work of civic departments is recognized and this responsibility is clearly assigned to the Board of Control.
3. The \$5,000 salary paid to each controller enables these men to devote considerable working time to the City's business.
4. There is a ready channel for promotion--from alderman to controller, and from controller to mayor.
5. The people of Toronto are fully accustomed to the system and the civic departments are used to operating under it.

Disadvantages

1. The two distinct types of representation play up the conflict between ward and city-wide interests.
2. A bare majority of Council can refer back questions on which a two-thirds vote is needed to override the Board of Control's recommendation. This regulation can be responsible for repeated delays in disposing of controversial business.
3. Most policy matters are considered in succession by three bodies with overlapping membership--a standing committee (frequently with an inexperienced chairman), the Board of Control and the full Council. The process wastes time, requires members to attend too many meetings, and opens the door to slipshod performance at all three stages.
4. The only requirement controllers must fill is city-wide popularity. Usually they have longer Council experience and, upon election to the Board, can give more time to civic business. But these qualifications do not ensure that the controllers have particular aptitude for service on the finance committee or for the other specialized responsibilities assigned to them.
5. Executive supervision and coordination of departmental operations are substantially jobs for the expert. With proper departmental organization, most of this work could be handled by department heads, individually and in committee.
6. Human nature being what it is, some candidates will be attracted to run for the Board of Control by the prestige of office and the \$5,000 salary. The danger is that they may prove good enough as campaigners to gain election but second-rate executives in the job.
7. The status conferred on a controller could create a bias among holders of the office in favour of maintaining the system.

Blueprint for the Future

With the objective of stimulating discussion on the subject, the Bureau has sketched out a proposed new structure of government. It is a plan which could be made to fit an amalgamated city with very few adjustments. Compared with the present system, the changes mooted may appear rather sweeping but we make no apology for that. For one of the Bureau's jobs is to advocate constructive developments. Nor is it enough to get behind plans that are already in wide favour. So long as new methods are

Population	Area	Ward
1,227 over	---	---
under 2,110	---	---
under 3,000	---	---
under 4,000	---	---
17,300 over	---	---
11,800 over	---	---
under 22,100	---	---
10,800 over	---	---
under 2,100	---	---

In 1910, the City Council created a special committee to study the organization of the City. This committee held a series of meetings extending over several months. At the year-end agreement had not yet been reached among the members and, when the chairman set out in the annual report, the committee was not continued.

The special committee had already accepted the necessity for reorganizing the City. The problem on which it was immediately divided was the shape the new wards should take. The present ward system extends from the waterfront as far north as the old Port Line railway, a distance of fully four miles. On the other hand, it ranges in width between one-third and three-quarters of a mile. Wards 1, 2, 3 and 4 have a similar irregular shape. Within the committee, a solid majority wanted to go away with these "stray" wards, as they are called, and to lay out the "block" wards shaped like the present Ward 5. Great concern, however, took up the minority viewpoint in favour of retaining the "stray" wards with slight boundary adjustments, and this situation led to the committee's quiet demise.

One reason the ward boundary problem has remained unsolved is the uncertainty of the outcome of the organization issue. In May of last year, the last of eleven witnesses appeared before the Ontario Municipal Board. Operating counsel presented their final evidence, and the Board set down to the job of sifting the thousands of words of written and verbal evidence placed before it. But now, as the time for a report draws near, evidence of municipal organization should have been renewed attention. A report to the Board is to remain the present boundaries or to be changed in a larger city, an efficient municipal structure is sorely needed. And, under other circumstances, a progressive type of city government should, we believe, include the same essential features.

The Board of Control System

The method of government which has been accepted in Toronto for many years, hinges on the strong position given to the Board of Control and the four controllers in the conduct of city business. One controller is appointed by the mayor and the other three are appointed by the Council. The mayor ex-officio sits on an advisory committee of Council. All Council reviews all standing committee reports before they are presented to Council. The Board, itself, serves as a central executive authority, as the standing committee on finance and deals with executive matters assigned to any standing or special committee. In the Council, the members have equal voting rights with the aldermen, but in the Board, the two-thirds majority to override the Board's decision on standing committee appointments and on the setting of rates, or to suspend or remove any member, is reserved to the Board.

believed to be sound and practical, there is value, we suggest, in bringing them to public attention.

A - The Electoral System

1. The City should be divided into a number of large electoral districts, replacing the present wards. If the city boundaries remain as they are, four electoral districts would be sufficient. In the event of amalgamation, there might be as many as eight districts--in some cases cutting across present municipal boundary lines.
2. Aldermen would be elected for overlapping three-year terms, and one alderman would be elected each year for each electoral district.
3. Each alderman would be nominated and run as a candidate from a particular district but voting on his election would be open to all voters throughout the city.
4. The mayor would be nominated and elected every second year on a city-wide basis and would serve for a two-year term.

While the idea of nomination by district and election at large is new to Ontario, the plan has operated successfully elsewhere. Here is how it would operate. Citizens in any particular district would meet and nominate opposing aldermanic candidates for their own district as they do now. At the election, the names of all candidates for their district would be listed on one ballot in the very same way they are listed today in ward elections. Each elector would vote in the regular way on the aldermanic contest in his own district with this exception--that he would have only one vote and only one candidate would be elected. In addition, however, the voter would be privileged to take and complete ballots for other districts of the city for which he wished to register a vote.

Nomination by district with voting open to all would enable electors to vote for candidates in the district where they work or have some similar interest as well as in their home district. It is anticipated, however, that very few voters would complete more than one or two district ballots. Nevertheless, the candidate whose qualities were known favourably outside his own district might receive some outside support, while the person who had been pressing the claims of his own district too strongly could be penalized by an outside vote. The successful contestant would be the person who could maintain a balanced approach to city-wide and district problems.

B - Council and Board of Education

1. The plan would provide for a Council composed of the Mayor and from 12 to 24 aldermen (depending on the number of districts). There would be no Board of Control.
2. The Board of Education would have the same number of elected trustees as there were aldermen on the Council. The elected trustees together with trustees representing the Separate School Board would choose a Chairman as they do now.
3. The Mayor should be paid approximately \$15,000 a year and each alderman \$3,000.
4. The Chairman of the Board and the trustees should also be paid but on a somewhat reduced scale.

Here are some of the strong and weak points of the present system:

Advantages

1. Election of the mayor and the four controllers at large ensures speakers-men for the city-wide viewpoint at all stages of the civic deliberations. The strategic position these members hold requires a strong combination of ward aldermen to override their wishes.
2. The need to coordinate the work of civic departments is recognized and this responsibility is clearly assigned to the Board of Control.
3. The \$2,000 salary paid to each controller enables them to devote considerable working time to the City's business.
4. There is a ready channel for promotion--from alderman to controller, and from controller to mayor.
5. The people of Toronto are fully accustomed to the system and the civic departments are used to operating under it.

Disadvantages

1. The two distinct types of representation play up the conflict between ward and city-wide interests.
2. A bare majority of Council can refer back questions on which a two-thirds vote is needed to override the Board of Control's recommendations. This regulation can be responsible for repeated delays in disposing of controversial business.
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Arguments for the Future

With the objective of stimulating discussion on the subject, the Bureau has sketched out a proposed new structure of government. It is a plan which could be made to fit an amalgamated city with very few adjustments. Compared with the present system, the changes needed are minor. It is to be advanced but we make no apology for that. For one of the Bureau's jobs is to advance constructive suggestions. Now is it enough to get behind plans that are already in wide favour. So long as new methods are

C - Committees

1. The Council and the Board of Education should be free to establish whatever standing and special committees seem necessary.
2. No extra compensation should be paid for committee service or other special responsibilities.
3. Standing committees should be kept small but have power to co-opt private citizens as additional non-voting members.
4. Standing committees should be chosen annually with the chairman and all members eligible for re-election.

D - The Administration

1. The heads of civic departments should meet regularly in order to coordinate departmental operations at the administrative level.
2. The present system of district administrative offices should be gradually extended and wherever possible combined under one roof.
3. Individual citizens should be encouraged to bring complaints, inquiries, or suggestions to the district offices.

At the present time, the local alderman is expected to deal with many taxpayer problems that could be cleared up quite readily by the City's paid staff. It is not suggested that local citizens should be prevented from taking up any question with their elected representatives. On the other hand, the representative will be better able to serve his constituents if he is not bothered, for example, whenever a garbage container is missed by the collector. With much larger electoral districts this point would assume added importance. At the same time, the City Council should encourage the development of strong ratepayers or community associations in local neighbourhoods and invite their suggestions through the district aldermen. Active home and school associations are no less essential to the real welfare of the Board of Education, and should likewise be encouraged.

Through the years, civic affairs in Toronto have suffered repeatedly by delays and inaction in the handling of public business. When decisions are taken, they give evidence too often of lack of study and experience. We need a system of government which will provide for continuity of service and which will foster the development and adoption of worthwhile improvements at a reasonable cost. Directly or indirectly, it is our elected representatives who must give us efficient traffic arteries, good schools, adequate public health services, proper fire and police protection and all the other amenities needed for a great city. How our representatives are chosen and the way in which they are required to operate will largely determine what they can accomplish for us.

*E. J. ...*  
President

*Eric Hardy*  
Director

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