

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



TELEPHONE RANDOLPH 5444

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

CIVIC AFFAIRS

THE TWO-YEAR TERM

Toronto's elected representatives control expenditures of over \$70 million a year. They rule on such questions as street widenings, homes for the aged, the zoning by-law, a new city hall. They sit on hospital boards, negotiate wage contracts with municipal employees' unions, and supervise the civic abattoir. BUT WE ASK THEM TO DO A COMPLICATED 20TH CENTURY JOB WITH A 19TH CENTURY TERM IN OFFICE!

* * * * *

Today it takes a good two years for the new member to master his job and contribute something constructive in civic affairs. For this reason, an ASSURED term of two years would make it easier to attract good candidates. As it stands, the person who is able to gain re-election must sacrifice service to electioneering--in campaigns where publicity stunts pay off more readily than performance. No wonder the great majority of councillors and school trustees--past and present--have favoured the longer term.

* * * * *

We cannot ensure sound government by a system whose main virtue is the opportunity for a frequent turnover of representatives. Democratic government must build on widespread concern with good nominations, care in voting, and active citizen-interest throughout the whole time that our representatives hold office. Mimico, the only municipality in Greater Toronto with the longer term, gets the best turnout at elections.

* * * * *

An annual saving of \$75,000--half the cost of taking the vote--would be one of the smaller dividends from the change.

Delegated Responsibilities

Non-council members on utilities and similar bodies, appointed by and responsible to the City Council, are given terms of two years or longer.

Annual elections make it more and more difficult for the Council to interpret and protect the public's interest in their activities.

The one-year term tempts the Council to farm out responsibilities to such authorities indiscriminately.

The Council appoints Planning Board members for three years, yet with only a single year itself is asked to translate plans into action.

Experience Elsewhere

Better than 99% of U.S. cities over 5,000 population elect council members for two or more years. Terms range up to six years, with four years the most common. The trend is to lengthen the term beyond two years.

In England, all councillors are elected for three years; aldermen are appointed for six.

Toronto, Hamilton and London are the only large cities on the continent that stick to the one-year term. Only one Canadian city outside Ontario retains the system. Even in this Province, the longer term is gaining ground. Thirteen of Ontario's 29 cities have made the switch, including Ottawa and Windsor.

OTHER ORGANIZATIONS WHICH ENDORSE THE LONGER TERM

The Association of Women Electors
The Toronto Board of Trade
The Inter-Club Council for Women in Public Affairs