



CIVIC AFFAIRS

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

ENLARGE THE LOCAL VOTING GROUP?

FELLOW CITIZENS: At the forthcoming elections, voters within the City of Toronto will be invited to approve or reject a proposal, originating with the Association of Women Electors, to give more people the vote. Subject to residence and citizenship requirements, the objective is to bring in universal adult suffrage, while respecting important features of the existing property franchise.

The vote on December 3rd cannot itself resolve the question except in the negative. To secure the suggested changes, legislation would have to be enacted by the province since it now possesses the sole authority to say who may vote in local elections. An affirmative vote would strongly encourage (but not require) the new City Council to seek to convince the province to pass the necessary legislation.

WHO MAY VOTE NOW

Throughout Ontario, the right of the individual to vote in local elections is confined, speaking generally, to adult British subjects who are:

- 1) owners or tenants of real property valued for tax purposes at not less than a stated minimum (\$400 in cities, \$300 in towns over 3,000, \$200 in other towns, \$100 in villages or townships). To qualify as a residential tenant, a person must maintain a separate domestic establishment of two or more rooms in which the occupants usually sleep and prepare and serve meals.
- 2) the wives or husbands of such persons.

This is the voting group which elects members of municipal councils, school boards and utility commissions and casts ballots on referendum questions other than money by-laws.

On money by-laws, the vote is granted to:

- 1) individual owners, qualified as above;
- 2) qualified individual tenants under long term leases which require them to pay the taxes;

- 3) a nominee of each corporation which, if it had been an individual, could vote on money by-laws.

Those otherwise entitled to vote need not reside in the municipality. In addition, in municipalities divided into wards, those qualified may vote once each in every ward where they qualify

- 1) in the election of ward representatives;
- 2) in the balloting on money by-laws.

In local elections, as also in provincial and federal contests, such persons as judges, certain election officers, prisoners, patients in mental hospitals and inmates of homes for the aged may not vote.

Throughout Ontario, the sons, daughters and sisters of a farmer who is qualified to vote locally are thereby entitled to vote if they can claim twelve months' residence on the farm. The point is scarcely of direct application to the Toronto scene.

WHAT IS BEING PROPOSED

Under the suggested arrangement, voting privileges would be as follows:

- 1) Both residents and non-residents would continue to qualify as municipal electors under the existing property franchise.
- 2) Individuals and corporation nominees could still cast ballots in each ward where they qualified on a property basis.
- 3) The right to rule on money by-laws would not be extended beyond the group now eligible.
- 4) The vote would also be given to other adult British subjects who had resided in Toronto throughout the election year. (From January 1st until the first Monday in December.) Such persons could vote for candidates and on referendum questions other than money by-laws.

Here is the referendum wording:

"Are you in favour of the City applying for legislation to extend the right to vote at municipal elec-

tions, except on money by-laws, to include all persons not now qualified to vote who have resided in the municipality through the year preceding election day, who are British subjects and who are over 21 years of age?"

Apparently no change is proposed from the present qualifications required of candidates for municipal office. Speaking generally, such persons must either be 1) qualified owners of property within the municipality who reside within five mile of its boundaries or, 2) qualified resident tenants of the municipality.

HOW MANY NEW VOTES?

No exact statement is possible as to the number of additional eligible voters that the proposed changes would bring. A useful estimate can be developed from the following information:

- 1) The outer boundaries of Toronto ridings for provincial elections coincide with the City's municipal boundaries.
- 2) Provincial electors must have resided in Ontario for twelve months preceding the polling day. This compares with a City residence requirement of under two months for the present resident voters and of some eleven months for the proposed new group.
- 3) For the city area, eligible voters in the two latest provincial elections compared as follows with resident electors for municipal elections in the same year.

Provincial Electorate in Toronto Ridings

DATE	NO.
Nov. 22/51	438,885
June 9/55	389,795

Resident Civic Electors

DATE	NO.
Dec. 3/51	317,186
Dec. 5/55	287,729

Taking account of the differing residence requirements, a conservative estimate is that the proposed legislation would increase the number of residents eligible to vote by more than twenty-five per cent. Based on the present population, at least 75,000 additional persons would gain the vote.

There is little purpose in seeking an enlargement of the electorate merely for the sake of numbers. Given any reasonable system of representation, the important requirement is widespread, active and intelligent interest by those entitled to vote. The point at issue is whether these additional people are entitled to a voice in the government of their local community. Arguments can be advanced pro and con.

AGAINST A CHANGE

1. Owners and tenants have a stake in the community and a demonstrated long-term interest in its future not matched by other local residents. Consequently they have a particular right to control its destinies.
2. Taxes on real property provide the bulk of local support for general municipal and school services or three-quarters of the money from all sources including provincial grants. Taxes constitute a first lien against property. The total assessment of a municipality is its security for capital borrowing. All these facts point up the propriety of keeping the property franchise.
3. Municipalities were formed to provide services to property and this continues as their chief responsibility. Although they have been required to take on added social service and similar responsibilities, the local authorities have little discretion in such fields and it is only fitting that the province should pay an increasing proportion of their cost.
4. It might be expected that the majority of new voters would be drawn from the lower income strata. On balance, they may favour increased spending and municipal generosity at the expense of the local property owners.
5. Extension of the franchise would make it easier for unauthorized names to be placed on the voters lists.
6. The province has always maintained the property franchise for local elections in all Ontario municipalities.
7. If universal suffrage were once adopted it would become politically impossible to restore the present system.

FOR THE CHANGE

1. Many responsible residents of Toronto are denied a voice in civic affairs because they do not happen to qualify under the existing property franchise.
2. Along with the age and citizenship requirements, continuous residence for one year should permit development of a sufficient understanding of the local issues.
3. The proposal would not reduce any of the existing privileges under the property franchise and, moreover, would recognize the particular concern of property owners with new capital commitments by preserving their exclusive voting rights on money by-laws.

4. Aside from the business tax, real property taxes are levied upon owners. Tenants are considered to be taxpayers indirectly because the owners recover the payments in rent. Are not occupants of shared accommodation also contributing when they pay for lodgings? Similarly, taxes payable by business concerns are passed on to the purchasers of their goods and services. The tax responsibility is really shared by all residents.
5. In rural areas, the equivalent problem does not exist because all adult members of farm families may vote. The provincial legislature cannot be expected to introduce changes until petitioned to do so by urban municipalities.
6. The interest in roads, parks, school services, welfare undertakings and the like is not confined to the present electorate. The range of such services has greatly expanded and has departed completely from the old concept of services to property.
7. Real property taxes are being supplemented increasingly by provincial grants, fines, fees, etc., as sources of local revenue. Public utilities, which also come under municipal control, are financed through rates or fares. Thus property owners cannot claim to be the only direct contributors to municipal budgets.
8. The minimum property qualification in cities has remained at \$400 since 1873. Consequently the size of a person's holding has lost all its one-time importance. In the circumstances the vote should no longer hinge on one's status as owner or tenant, which cannot be shown to indicate one's economic or social status.
9. Property qualifications were at one time a condition of voting in all provincial and in federal elections. They remained common until after World War I and the last of them was eliminated as recently as 1936. It is just as logical to remove property qualifications from local elections.
10. Subject to a residence qualification, universal suffrage has been introduced throughout Alberta, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, the cities and towns of Saskatchewan, the City of Vancouver and a number of other individual municipalities. In many other jurisdictions only a nominal taxpaying qualification has been retained. The trend towards universal suffrage throughout Canada is unmistakable.
11. The property franchise was abandoned over a century ago in local elections throughout the

United States and came to an end in the United Kingdom eleven years ago.

12. The turnout in local elections is consistently much worse than in provincial or federal elections. Even where universal suffrage has been secured, local turnouts fall behind. But the broader franchise should bring improvement. If all persons could expect to vote from the age of twenty-one, civic affairs could be made a subject of universal public interest. Campaigning would also be simplified and should receive wider publicity.

THE IMPORTANCE TO THE SUBURBS

If Toronto should vote in favour of extended voting privileges, the province could implement the proposal in one of three ways:

- 1) by private legislation applicable to Toronto alone;
- 2) by general legislation which makes the change mandatory in a designated group of municipalities or throughout all municipalities;
- 3) by general legislation creating the option for all municipalities, possibly subject to a favourable referendum vote.

The second or third alternatives would, in the Bureau's view, be decidedly preferable.

Suburban municipalities have in consequence reason to be interested in the results of the Toronto vote, particularly in light of the province's recent imposition of a standard two-year term and common dates for nominations and elections throughout Metropolitan Toronto.

THE BUREAU'S STAND

Nearly five years ago, the following statement was put forward as part of a submission by the Bureau to the Ontario Government: "In the light of changes in municipal responsibilities and revenue sources, it is suggested that the Government give consideration to widening the municipal franchise."

Now that the issue is being placed before the electors of the City, the Bureau has again considered the question and suggests that, on balance, the stronger argument can be made for an affirmative vote.

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