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CIVIC AFFAIRS

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

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WHY THE APATHY IN LOCAL ELECTIONS?

Fellow Citizens:

The recent Dominion elections demonstrated once again that the apathy which is so prevalent in municipal elections does not extend to federal contests. Perhaps it is because more citizens are entitled to vote in national elections that between 71 and 72 per cent of the electorate exercised their franchise in our latest contest. Few municipalities can claim as high a degree of interest in their elections as was shown in the national election.

As revealed in the supplement to this open letter, interest in our local elections is only about half that of the interest in national elections. In the supplement the Bureau presents its fifteenth consecutive analysis of Toronto's voting turnout and the ninth comparison between the turnout in city and suburbs. Realizing the alacrity of citizens to vote federally, their reluctance to vote at the municipal level may seem more perplexing than disappointing.

Why should citizens who neglect to vote in municipal elections have turned out in such large numbers on June tenth?

Firstly, the weather in the Toronto area was auspicious. June would appear to be a better month than December for elections as for weddings. Holding the municipal elections in the dark of winter may discourage many potential voters from going to the polls. In June there is daylight all the time the polls are open. It is much easier to approach a strange dwelling in daylight than in the early darkness of a wintry night. Perhaps December with its greater possibility for inclement weather, is badly chosen as the time for local elections.

How important is the law requiring the provision of three full hours for voting to all employees? Probably few employers would deny an employee the amount of time off he actually requires to get to the polling booth. Yet the employee who, without time off, finds it awkward or impossible to vote is scarcely likely to raise the issue.

There is a much wider franchise for federal elections than for most local ones. There is a theory that to consider the municipal franchise as a privilege dependent upon property qualifications will result in the vote being more valued. In practice the limitations imposed on the right to vote may give too many citizens, especially young adults, a valid excuse for believing that civic elections are none of their concern. Our municipal election system is not designed to simplify mass appeals to the electorate or to encourage a large and spontaneous response to them.

Does the manner of enumeration have any effect on the attitude to elections? Direct enumeration may well arouse interest in a forthcoming election, while by contrast the much earlier visit of a municipal assessor to secure the information necessary for the preparation of the local voters' list may do more harm than good if, indeed, the connection between the assessor's visit and local voting is realized.

While the federal enumeration of voters has become a perplexing problem because of the mobility of our citizens, it is less a challenge than the compilation of municipal voters' lists because each qualified person is entitled to one vote only. The municipal franchise is still related to property so that an individual may be entitled to vote in more than one place; non-residents may be entered on the voters' lists. When it comes to voting absentee voters may find it not only difficult to acquaint themselves with local candidates, but even a problem to get to the polling booths on election day. It is manifestly easier for the persons on the federal lists to vote than for all the eligible voters on municipal lists to exercise the franchise.

In local elections there are usually many offices to fill, with perhaps, in addition, a referendum question on the ballot. In contrast, the federal election in Canada has the attractiveness of simplicity, with only one choice to be indicated. Furthermore, in provincial and federal elections party politics facilitates the choice of the candidate for many of the electorate; in local elections the necessity to vote for individuals whose future activities can prove totally unrelated to their pre-election promises makes the problem of choice an acute one for the ordinary citizen.

With all the federal elections slated for the same day, and with the aid of full-fledged national campaigns, a large amount of interest in the campaign is engendered. Party workers actively encourage and assist people to get to the polls. Under such circumstances the process of voting may take on the appearance and appeal of a national ritual. In contrast, local elections are just that, benefiting from no unifying influence. While elections throughout greater Toronto indirectly select members of the Metropolitan Council, in the mind of the public they are primarily local. Even though in 1956, for the first time, all Metro elections were held on the same day, there was no observable increase in interest attributable to that change. Perhaps it takes time to develop.

Metropolitan Toronto continues to be a city on the move. The number of revisions in the voters' lists after they have been compiled is an indication of the number of people changing their place of residence. Beyond what these recorded changes reveal, there must be many more citizens who find themselves at election time in another location than where they are shown on the voters' list. Even though such persons are legally entitled to vote at their former residence it is not logical to expect them to do so.

Insofar as the Toronto metropolitan area is concerned, the high rate of population influx, coupled with the extent of internal migrations, has obviously reduced the number of citizens capable of informed participation in any particular local election. New suburbanites whose place of work and cultural interests remain in the central city may be much more familiar with city than with suburban politics. While a family which moves from one municipality to another loses nothing of its interest in federal questions, it may take several years to re-establish a reasonable understanding of local issues.

Voting, of course, is not the sole attribute of democracy. Many individuals may not cast votes at elections, but they may still influence local government through their association with others in various groups which make representations to local councils. To a large extent the federal election offers a citizen his only opportunity to influence Ottawa; the civic election is only one way in which an individual can let local authorities know how he feels. A citizen may feel quite correctly that his presence on a delegation to city hall will be much more effective than his attendance at a polling booth.

Perhaps this aspect of democratic government should be valued as much as the vote. Since local politicians are very susceptible to the opinions of organized groups, and elected representatives are known to respond to appeals from individual constituents, citizens need not feel that casting their vote is necessarily the end of their civic duties until the next election. Indeed, if their interest ceases there what has been achieved at election time may become considerably diluted subsequently. Organized minorities may obtain favourable actions that would not be forthcoming if based on the number of voters they represent. In the absence of an indication of opinions by other groups, councils may be misled as to the nature of major public opinion. In the long run the electorate may remove those representatives who have not gauged correctly the attitude of the public, but in the short run citizens who rely only on their voting power may have to be content with less than satisfactory government.

While these observations are not to be construed as suggesting that local elections have become less important, certainly it is increasingly evident that many organizations are being closely listened to at city hall and other municipal offices. In view of this development more organizations must take it upon themselves to determine the opinion of their members on particular matters as they arise and then to inform the elected representatives of these attitudes. Renewed interest in local matters by associations of all kinds should help to concentrate interest in local government and, as well, to extend the process of citizen education that is an indispensable condition for intelligent voting.

In the opinion of the Bureau, the recent federal elections are an indication that at least three Canadians in four still prize the vote. There is, as revealed in the low percentages in the attached voting analysis, a major problem in the lack of interest of many of the same people in local elections. Why there is such a difference in behaviour in the two elections is not known completely. The problem offers a challenge to all elements of our community. Where stunts and slogans are not the important means of producing a large turnout, a voting public is an interested public; and an interested public will keep a watchful eye on the activities of the government it elects.

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VOTING ANALYSIS

The Voters' List. While for federal and provincial elections eligibility to vote is based on personal qualifications, in local governments under Ontario law the right to vote is related to property qualifications as well. The voters' list is based on work done by the assessor. Unlike the federal and provincial requirements, residence is not a necessary qualification, so that the owner of a property is entered on the voters' list irrespective of his place of residence, and tenants of business premises subject to the business tax are entitled to a vote even if their home is situated in another municipality.

In all cases voters must be British subjects and aged twenty-one or over. The vote is given to such individuals who are owners or tenants of real property assessed at not less than \$400 in cities, \$300 in the larger towns and \$100 in the townships. The wife or husband of such an owner or tenant is also entitled to the municipal franchise and is categorized as an "MF" voter. Owners, tenants, and the "MF" voters related thereto who are not occupants of the property for which they are assessed for taxation purposes are designated "ME" voters. This indicates Municipal Election only, not entitled to vote in a provincial election in that place.

CITY OF TORONTO

Each eligible voter is entitled to one vote for Mayor, four votes for controller and, in addition, in each ward the person has a vote, to two votes for alderman and two votes for Board of Education representatives, or one vote for a member of the Metropolitan School Board where the person is marked "S" on the Voters' List.

An eligible voter's name may appear, quite legally, more than once on the Voters' Lists in the City of Toronto--once in each ward in which the person owns or rents property over the minimum assessment. A person owning or renting more than one property in a single ward is listed only once in that ward, with the designation OP after his name, to indicate he is assessed for Other Premises within that ward. As can be imagined from the complex regulations the preparation of the voters' lists is an exhausting task.

How Many ME Voters Are Entitled to a Full Ballot?

Since the property qualification is paramount to residential, there are many non-residents of the City of Toronto who, besides having the right to vote in their home municipality, are entitled to a full city ballot if they meet the property qualifications in Toronto. There are no figures available of how many persons listed as ME's live outside the City of Toronto and are entitled to vote for mayor and controllers, as well as for alderman and school trustees in each ward in which they are listed.

In the accompanying table the Bureau indicates the numbers of the various types of voters in the City of Toronto for the last three years. "Other voters" includes tenants and the wives and husbands of tenants. The total voters is the total number of listings on the voters' lists of all nine wards, including the duplication of names when a person has a vote in more than one ward.

Since as noted above some of the ME voters will be resident within the City of Toronto but not entitled to vote on the basis of their place of residence, the number of persons entitled to vote in the city will be greater than the resident total. The number of persons who could vote in the 1956 elections for the 1957-58 Council is somewhat more than the resident total of 284,113, but less than 331,560, the total voters.

| | 1954 | 1955 | 1956 |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Resident Owners | 131,018 | 130,154 | 127,198 |
| Other Resident Voters (MF's) | 163,128 | 157,575 | 156,915 |
| Total Resident Voters | <u>294,146</u> | <u>287,729</u> | <u>284,113</u> |
| Non-resident Owners | 23,752 | 21,687 | 21,285 |
| Other non-resident Voters (ME-MF's) | 26,516 | 30,626 | 26,162 |
| Total Non-resident Voters (ME's) | 50,268 | 52,313 | 47,447 |
| Total Owners | 154,770 | 151,841 | 148,483 |
| Other Voters (MF's) | 189,644 | 188,201 | 183,077 |
| Total Voters | 344,414 | 340,042 | 331,560 |
| Public School Supporters | 317,215 | 312,440 | 303,850 |
| Separate School Supporters | 27,199 | 27,602 | 27,710 |

The Voting Turnout in Each Ward

The figures in the next table of votes polled do not necessarily represent the total number of persons resident within the City of Toronto who claimed a vote. Because of the privilege possessed by ME voters to have a vote in each ward in which they own or rent property, there is some duplication of names in the city total. The amount of this duplication that occurred is not known, but civic officials familiar with poll clerks' returns feel that the number of citizens voting more than once is small.

In computing the percentage of electors voting the city hall hand-book compares the total number of votes claimed with the total number of electors entered on the voters' lists. Both numbers include the ME voters. In 1956 with 98,308 people voting, this was 29.6% of the 331,560 names on the Voters' Lists. While there were 98,308 voters polled there were only 90,356 votes counted in the mayoralty contest. The difference is 7,952, of which an unknown number would be spoilt, retained, or unclaimed ballots, and the remainder due to ME voters who claimed their right to vote in more than one ward, but voted only once for mayor.

Number of Voters in Each Ward

| Ward | 1953 | 1954 | 1955 | 1956 |
|-------|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| 1 | 10,549 | 13,288 | 11,445 | 10,821 |
| 2 | 8,584 | 9,503 | 8,407 | 8,114 |
| 3 | 5,901 | 6,282 | 6,304 | 5,869 |
| 4 | 9,252 | 9,893 | 8,471 | 7,282 |
| 5 | 12,712 | 12,953 | 11,069 | 9,557 |
| 6 | 16,957 | 19,279 | 15,681 | 15,360 |
| 7 | 9,202 | 10,171 | 8,363 | 8,083 |
| 8 | 15,186 | 19,351 | 16,446 | 15,199 |
| 9 | 18,058 | 21,367 | 18,535 | 18,023 |
| Total | <u>106,411</u> | <u>122,087</u> | <u>104,721</u> | <u>98,308</u> |

Number of Votes Cast on Various Ballots

FOR MAYOR

The total number of possible votes for mayor is the sum of resident electors plus the ME voters eligible to vote for mayor, either because they reside outside the city or elsewhere in the city where they are not

entitled to vote. As in former years the Bureau uses the total number of resident voters as the "possible" votes, and realizes that the percentages of actual to possible votes are slightly higher than they would be if the actual "possible" vote for mayor were obtainable.

| | | | | |
|----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | <u>1953</u> | <u>1954</u> | <u>1955</u> | <u>1956</u> |
| Actual | 101,195 | 118,998 | 99,680 | 90,356 |
| Possible | 301,024 | 294,146 | 287,729 | 284,113 |

Actual as % of Possible

| <u>Ward</u> | <u>%</u> | <u>%</u> | <u>%</u> | <u>%</u> |
|-------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1 | 27.8 | 36.5 | 31.1 | 30.1 |
| 2 | 31.0 | 36.2 | 31.4 | 30.5 |
| 3 | 34.6 | 42.6 | 38.6 | 35.0 |
| 4 | 34.1 | 38.7 | 33.8 | 28.7 |
| 5 | 31.9 | 35.5 | 31.1 | 26.2 |
| 6 | 30.7 | 36.4 | 30.4 | 29.1 |
| 7 | 35.4 | 40.9 | 34.0 | 32.1 |
| 8 | 33.5 | 43.2 | 36.3 | 32.3 |
| 9 | 44.6 | 53.3 | 45.5 | 41.5 |
| All Wards | 33.6 | 40.5 | 34.6 | 31.8 |

FOR CONTROLLERS

Each voter entitled to vote for mayor may cast four votes for controllers. Theoretically the number of votes for controllers should equal four times the possible votes for mayor. In computing the percentage of votes cast for controllers the Bureau uses the same base as for mayor, the number of residents entitled to vote, and multiplies this by four.

The percentage of the votes cast is in all cases lower than that indicated for mayor. This could indicate a greater number of spoiled ballots, or an indifference to voting for controllers, but is most likely an indication of the prevalence of "plumping", that is, indicating "X" against fewer than four names on the ballot.

It is possible that many voters, accustomed in federal and provincial elections to marking their "X" against only one name cannot bring themselves to mark four "X's" on the ballot for controllers, and two on the ballot for aldermen. Having a possible six ballots is complex enough, without having to remember four choices for controller, two for aldermen.

It is easy to criticize the practice of deliberate "plumping" on the grounds that it is a devious method of assisting one candidate by refusing votes to other candidates. In the light of the continued practice of "plumping", perhaps it is time to review the method of electing controllers, aldermen and public school board representatives. In many elections the position of controllers and aldermen in votes secured is much more the contest than the determination of who is elected. If there are only four well known candidates for controllers, and, in any ward, only two major contestants for the alderman's seat, the major electoral struggle will be between the four controllers or two aldermen. The recipient of most votes for controller is usually selected as Vice-Chairman of the Board of Control and President of Council. In addition, the two leading controllers automatically secure seats on the Council of Metropolitan Toronto. Similarly, the alderman in each ward securing the highest number of votes becomes a member of Metro Council. Candidates cannot feel that it is relatively unimportant who leads the poll as long as election is assured.

How effective is the present system in insuring that the most popular candidate receives the greatest number of votes? If all voters voted a full ballot, or if there was an election law that only complete ballots would be counted, there would not be such a problem as is now presented. If there is a concerted drive to plump for one candidate, while the voters for the other leading candidates apportion their votes, distortion is bound to occur. The "good" voters harm their preferred candidates by voting for others as well, while "bad" voters help their particular man by denying to the other candidates votes that should fall to them under the arrangement. Logically, for fear of this "trick" being pulled by their contenders for leading position, all candidates should shortly be forced to advise their supporters to vote only for themselves individually.

Below is the voting analysis of voting for controllers.

| | 1953 | 1954 | 1955 | 1956 |
|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Actual | 305,632 | 348,679 | 301,386 | 289,277 |
| Possible | 1,204,096 | 1,176,584 | 1,150,916 | 1,136,452 |

Actual as % of Possible

| Ward | % | % | % | % |
|-----------|------|------|------|------|
| 1 | 21.5 | 26.8 | 23.4 | 24.3 |
| 2 | 23.2 | 26.4 | 23.8 | 23.9 |
| 3 | 27.0 | 32.9 | 29.8 | 28.7 |
| 4 | 23.2 | 26.0 | 23.1 | 21.5 |
| 5 | 21.2 | 22.4 | 20.1 | 19.1 |
| 6 | 22.4 | 25.8 | 22.4 | 22.5 |
| 7 | 26.8 | 29.8 | 25.6 | 25.5 |
| 8 | 26.4 | 32.7 | 28.6 | 26.8 |
| 9 | 36.9 | 43.0 | 37.9 | 35.2 |
| All Wards | 25.4 | 29.7 | 26.2 | 25.5 |

FOR WARD REPRESENTATIVES

In the election of ward representatives an individual may vote in each ward where, either as resident or non-resident, he has the required qualifications. The individual may be an owner or tenant, or the spouse of an owner or tenant. There are thus six main categories of voters, whose numbers in 1956 were of the following order:

Analysis of Numbers of Voters - 1956

| Residents: | | Municipal Electors: | |
|------------|---------|---------------------|--------|
| Owners | 127,198 | Owners | 21,285 |
| Tenants | 93,080 | Tenants | 13,446 |
| MF's | 63,835 | MF's | 12,716 |
| Total | 284,113 | | 47,447 |

Voters by Property Classification:

| | |
|-------------------------|---------|
| Total Number of Owners | 148,483 |
| Total Number of Tenants | 106,526 |
| Total Number of MF's | 76,551 |
| Total Voters | 331,560 |

In analysing the voting for mayor and controllers comparison was made between the number of votes cast and a possible vote based on the number of resident voters. In analysing the percentage of votes cast for aldermen and school trustees comparison will be made between votes cast and a possible vote based twice on the total number of eligible voters.

Since all ME voters are entitled to vote for aldermen and board of education representatives, either public or separate, it is meaningful to include the ME as well as resident voters in the possible vote. However,

the result is that the percentage figures for the aldermanic vote are lower than those for mayor and controller in all but wards 6 and 7 where there were a greater percentage of votes cast for aldermen than for controllers. Ward 3 has a much better percentage in voting for mayor and controllers than it has for aldermen where the total voting list is used as the base. But many of the ME voters in Ward 3 may have voted only at their place of residence in other wards, and may consider that they are not being derelict in their duty if they do not exercise their right to vote at all the polls where by law they are given the vote.

In the four wards where there was voting for school trustees the percentage vote for school trustees was much smaller than that for the other offices. The percentage vote for all wards is based on the votes cast and possible votes in only those wards holding elections.

| | Aldermen | | | Trustees | | |
|----------|----------|---------|---------|----------|---------|---------|
| | 1954 | 1955 | 1956 | 1954 | 1955 | 1956 |
| Actual | 182,801 | 167,208 | 161,715 | 138,133 | 99,834 | 48,159 |
| Possible | 639,256 | 640,084 | 663,120 | 514,816 | 486,274 | 266,244 |

| Ward | Actual as % of Possible | | | Ward | Actual as % of Possible | | |
|-----------|-------------------------|------|------|-----------|-------------------------|------|------|
| | % | % | % | | % | % | % |
| 1 | 26.7 | 22.9 | 24.3 | 1 | * | 19.5 | * |
| 2 | 25.9 | 22.1 | 23.6 | 2 | 23.7 | * | * |
| 3 | * | 21.0 | 19.9 | 3 | * | 18.6 | 18.9 |
| 4 | 24.1 | 21.1 | 18.8 | 4 | 20.9 | 18.6 | 16.5 |
| 5 | 23.7 | 20.6 | 18.8 | 5 | 20.4 | 18.6 | 17.0 |
| 6 | 21.8 | 22.1 | 23.0 | 6 | 24.1 | 20.0 | 19.4 |
| 7 | 29.5 | 24.8 | 27.3 | 7 | 26.1 | 22.1 | * |
| 8 | 23.4 | 27.9 | 26.5 | 8 | 29.8 | 24.6 | * |
| 9 | 42.9 | 35.0 | 34.6 | 9 | 39.5 | * | * |
| All Wards | 28.6 | 26.1 | 24.4 | All Wards | 26.8 | 20.5 | 18.1 |

*Acclamation

II. COMPARATIVE RETURNS - CITY AND SUBURBAN VOTING

In comparing voting in Toronto with the turnout in the other metropolitan municipalities, the Bureau uses the percentage of votes cast for candidates contesting the CHIEF OFFICE. For the last two years in which there was an election for mayor or reeve the number of votes cast is compared with the total number of votes that could have been cast. Because of acclamations, in four of the thirteen area municipalities there was no contest for the chief office in 1956, and in others the year in which the office was previously contested varies considerably.

The average for the suburban municipalities is obtained by comparing the total votes cast for all the suburbs with the total possible votes. This procedure offsets the influence of those municipalities with small populations and a relatively high voting record. Thus while nine of the twelve suburban municipalities show a better record than does Toronto, the suburban average is below that of the central city because the larger municipalities tended to have a poorer turnout. In general voting turnout would appear to be in inverse relationship to the size of the municipality.

| Municipality | Office | Date Last Contested | Actual as % of Possible | Previously Contested | Actual as % of Possible |
|------------------|--------|---------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| New Toronto | Mayor | Dec./56 | 40.0 | Dec./54 | 49.0 |
| Weston | Mayor | Dec./54 | 39.4 | Dec./53 | 43.6 |
| Mimico | Mayor | Dec./56 | 39.1 | Dec./54 | 44.4 |
| Swansea | Reeve | Jan./48 | 38.2 | Jan./45 | 46.1 |
| Long Branch | Reeve | Dec./56 | 36.9 | Dec./54 | 41.1 |
| Forest Hill | Reeve | Dec./49 | 35.1 | Dec./48 | 42.5 |
| North York | Reeve | Dec./56 | 34.2 | Dec./55 | 33.1 |
| Leaside | Mayor | Dec./55 | 34.0 | Dec./53 | 37.8 |
| Scarborough | Reeve | Dec./56 | 31.9 | Dec./55 | 38.6 |
| TORONTO | Mayor | Dec./56 | 31.8 | Dec./55 | 34.6 |
| York | Reeve | Dec./56 | 28.8 | Dec./55 | 23.9 |
| East York | Reeve | Dec./56 | 26.0 | Dec./54 | 21.8 |
| Etobicoke | Reeve | Dec./56 | 25.7 | Dec./46 | 38.1 |
| Suburban Average | | | 31.0 | | 32.6 |