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The Citizen and the
City's Business



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Bureau of Municipal Research
Toronto

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Toronto has approximately 500,000 citizens, young and old. They spend in their corporate capacity from about \$12,000,000 to \$14,000,000 per year. They employ in city services on the average 7,500 employees.

The citizens have a right to know how their money is being spent and what their employees are doing. A city whose affairs are either too complex or too badly reported to be understood by the citizens is in grave danger of misgovernment.

Modern popular government rests on the assumption that the citizens are intelligent enough to understand their own business and that it is possible to establish forms of doing and reporting public business which will make citizen understanding of its salient features easy and continuous.

This assumption is the first article in the creed of the Toronto Bureau of Municipal Research. As not every citizen has the time and means to ascertain the facts of city government for himself, a group of citizens have pooled their interests and resources to do collectively what cannot be done individually. This collective effort is the Toronto Bureau of Municipal Research, which aims to be an "independent, non-partisan agency for keeping all citizens informed about the city's business."

The second great method basal to the Bureau's work is that of co-operation — co-operation with individual citizens through a Help-Your-City-Suggestion department and with city officials in establishing efficiency systems whenever such co-operation is welcome. The Bureau aims "to get things done for the community through persons who are in office." The Bureau's sympathy for officials who work under handicaps is as real as its sympathy for citizens who do not receive full value for taxes paid. To fulfill its purposes

therefore, the Bureau must win the entire confidence of citizens and officials alike through the accuracy and unbiased character of its fact-gathering and fact-telling service, and through the possession of a staff thoroughly competent to survey all city services and install or assist in installing the most modern and efficient methods of doing civic business.

In comparison with the experience of Bureaus elsewhere, the Toronto Bureau has made an excellent beginning on its program. The Bureau started out to raise a fund of \$150,000, to be expended in five years. Owing to the interruption of the war, it is operating at present on an annual budget of \$15,000. While this expenditure makes possible some very valuable work, opportunities for effective service are opening up so rapidly that the necessity for a \$30,000 budget, originally planned, is more than ever apparent.

At present the Bureau is interested in getting the following things done:—

1. The establishment of a scientific form of budget or estimates which will be a real statement of the city's yearly program.

2. The adoption of the budget or estimates as early in each year as possible, in order to lessen interest charges and to shorten the period during which the city must operate its business without a definite plan.

3. The installation of the most modern and efficient system available of city accounting, so that responsible financial and accounting officers of the city may currently and easily, as a matter of routine,

Supply all information necessary for effective administration;
Maintain an adequate accounting control of all city departments;

Issue balance sheets with supporting detailed statements in such form that the "man in the street" can understand them;

Know exactly what the city owes and what the city owns.

4. The improvement of living conditions, touching safety, com-

fort, health, education and recreation.

The Bureau is not interested in the personal fortunes of any person or group of persons. It has absolutely no interest in partisan politics. It is not a board of censors. It will not attack individuals but will fearlessly tell the facts regarding any inefficiency or failure to give full value in civic service for taxes paid. Neither will it give credit to individuals as individuals, but will make public the plain facts as to any advance steps in methods of administration or any increased or improved civic service.

If the public will give adequate moral and financial support, the Bureau has no doubt that its policy of centering the citizens' attention on the impersonal facts as to city administration, and not upon irrelevant personalities, will lead within five years to tremendous advances in the administration of Toronto's civic affairs and as a direct consequence to similar advances in Municipalities all over Canada.

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