

# THE CANADIAN MUNICIPAL JOURNAL

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## A TWO YEAR TERM OF OFFICE

We have constantly advocated the system by which the members of municipal Councils should be elected for two years, one half retiring every year; and have deprecated the continuance of the single year term which prevails in Ontario, New Brunswick and British Columbia.

As to the last named Province, it is gratifying to note that the Royal Commission on Municipal Laws (whose report is given elsewhere), has recommended the change from a one year term to two years.

The idea of a one year term has probably originated in the United States, and its sponsors evidently believed in the "new blood" and "new broom" theory.

The only argument that can reasonably be advanced for a one year term is that if a Council, in any way, proves undesirable, it is possible for the voters to turn them all out at the end of the year. And the advocates of the one year term harp a good deal upon this "rod in pickle" aid in keeping the men whom they have elected, in the straight and narrow path of duty.

Of course, if cases in which it was necessary to turn out all the members of the Council at the end of any year were frequent, this argument would have some force. But such occasions are, we are glad to say, very rare in Canada. So that the advantages of the single year term for this purpose are slight and theoretical.

On the other hand, it must be admitted that it is more difficult to get the right men to stand for election for a single year, than if the term were two years. The man who is readily worth while often objects to fighting every year for a position of public service.

And there is always the possibility that the whole—or at least the majority—of any one-year term Council, are new men, who know nothing whatever of municipal matters. This is almost, if not quite, as serious as having half of the Council composed of really undesirable men. For incompetence, or ignorance, is sometimes more hurtful than well managed business that may be more expensive than is proper.

And it must be remembered that where it is desirable to radically change the complexion of a Council, this is possible under the two-year term, if the mayor (as in Quebec) be elected annually. For one-half the Council and the Mayor form a majority, and if it be advisable, this majority can be changed at the election in any year, so that if a "bad" council has been elected, it is possible to thwart its power at the end of one year by electing another Mayor and half the Council, thus giving a majority control.

It seems significant that not only in "old Quebec," and Nova Scotia, but also in the Provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta, the two year term obtains. If Quebec were alone, it might be thought to be a survival of the French regime, unchangeable as the laws of the Medes and Persians under the fossilizing influence of the British North America Act. But when Saskat-

chewan,—where we consider that the most up-to-date and perfect municipal system on the continent prevails, and which is closely followed by Alberta—is in favour of a two year term, the idea must be admitted to be eminently modern and practical.

It is satisfactory to see that the Municipal Improvement League of Toronto has adopted resolutions in favour of the two year term, and this article is inspired by an enquiry from the League as to the conditions in which the question now stands. We were glad to be able to supply the League with information and to chronicle their activity; and hope to be able to record the success of their campaign.

Of course the above refers to the general laws in force, and does not apply to special charters of certain cities.

In Parliament and in the Legislature, the system of a long term is freely admitted as the only correct one. And if these bodies can be trusted to do their work satisfactorily with terms of such length as now obtain, surely a similar condition might be considered satisfactory for a municipal council.

It has always been a surprise to us to find that under the one-year term, such good men could be found as are sitting in Toronto, for instance.

But the exigencies and hard work devolving upon every member of a municipal council today are such as to make the securing of good men more difficult all the time.

As this is the case, every obstacle that would keep back the very best business men should be carefully removed. And the one-year term is certainly one very serious objection, for few big men will undertake an annual fight to get into a position that gives some honour, much work and probable abuse.

The path of public service should be made easy for the man who would do good work there, and difficult for the man who would seek it.

And there is a negative argument against the one-year term, in the fact that the electors would be much more particular about the kind of man who is to serve for two years, than for one who can be turned out at the end of a year.

So far as the Board of Control system is in operation, we believe that the plan adopted in Montreal is infinitely preferable to that in use in Toronto. In Montreal, the four Controllers are elected for four years, and the Mayor for two years, while in Toronto, the one-year term governs the mayoralty and controller-ships, as it does the Council.

The same argument, however, holds good here as under the general law. It is certainly easier to get good men to stand for election for a two-year term as Mayor, or four-year term as Controller, than for a one-year term. Montreal is also wise in paying higher salaries to the Controllers and requiring the whole of their time, but that is another question, and does not come into the discussion as to the length of term.