

BUSINESS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT *By Anthony Liversidge*

## BUSINESS HELPS THE CITY PLAN

WITH a land area in excess of three and a half million square miles, one third of it "developed", it is perhaps ironic that Canadians, in common with the rest of the world, are crowding into a few major cities. But Americans who think of Canada as thinly settled can be reminded that the province of Ontario, by census definition, was already 77.3% urbanised at the turn of this decade—more so, in fact, than at least forty states.

Metropolitan Toronto, whose growth is virtually responsible for that statistic, has expanded more rapidly than most other major metropolises on the North American continent through the first half of the Sixties. Net migration, immigration and natural increase have fed a growth in population of 4 to 5% a year, and brought the total to 1,880,000 in 1967. Despite the Pill, which this year has dented the Ontario birth rate by a noticeable 9%, even the more conservative experts project this figure over the 3 million mark in ten years.

If the city handles its growing pains with administrative skill it may be due in no small measure to a tiny, business-financed organization, which seems to have currently replaced the city's federated municipal government structure as Toronto's chief claim to fame among city experts around the world.

There are more than 200 similar groups active in the States, but Toronto's Bureau of Municipal Research is unique in Canada. As its name implies, it is a research body devoted to municipal problems, and its current annual budget of \$55,000 is entirely financed by subscriptions from the business community. Its normal complement of full time professional staff is four.

## Across the unbridgeable

The Bureau last year departed from its normal year-to-year activity of researching civic affairs on behalf of its members, public officials and news media, and presenting briefs to legislatures and other public bodies, and precipitated itself into the international limelight by undertaking



Hurst (left) and DelGuidice  
*Keeping an eye on spending*

what may be Canada's most influential Centennial project.

Drumming up a further \$330,000 from provincial and Federal governments, foundations and business, the Bureau has staged a unique, 18-month cooperative programme of urban studies with participating committees of experts in 37 major cities from Winnipeg to Moscow. What makes the project unique is not only the pooling of talent from so many different countries and in so many disciplines (specialists in every field relevant to urban problems were involved) but also that planners and government ministers are joined by university professors and businessmen.

The high point of the programme, which is still current, was the ten-day bilingual conference held in August at York University in Toronto. It attracted such diverse experts as Lady Ursula Hicks of Oxford University and Valentin Kamensky, chief of the Leningrad Town Planning and Architectural Management Board. At the end of the conference, together with the other 238 top academics, officials and executives that attended, they stood up in a unanimous vote to continue the programme indefinitely under the auspices of the Bureau in Toronto.

A small Canadian group has thus seen its initiative rewarded with the opportunity of becoming the nucleus of an international secretariat which will act as a clearing house of information on urban problems. The Bureau has pulled off a notable coup in getting in on the ground floor of international cooperation in this field, especially since previous international conferences on metropolitan problems have seen little achieved. Even though there were 140 cities of over 1 million in population in 1964, against only seven in 1870, former attempts have failed for lack of common ground between participants. An unbridgeable gap lies between the problems of cities at different levels of economic and urban development.

Ironically, this was both the chief basis for press scepticism as to the value of the conference and the factor which, since it was carefully taken into account by the Bureau, prompted its ultimate unqualified success. Critics made much of the sight of a Nigerian from Ibadan, a city of 1,200,000 which reportedly cannot afford sewers, listening in silence to a Californian debating multi million dollar expenditure on super highways.

## Success without glamour

As it turned out, the Conference realised the aim of the Bureau to uncover fundamental principles relating to all kinds of urban problems, rather than to swap solutions on specifics. On this level, communication was so constructive that since the conference ended, according to F. Warren Hurst, the Bureau president and vice president of Consumers' Gas, participating teams have again "definitely asked the Bureau to establish an ongoing secretariat."

Another index of the Bureau's success was the unprecedented accolade it received from its peers, the Governmental Research Association, in the form of two consecutive top annual awards. The 1967 award, for distinguished research, was for the study papers written by world experts for the Centennial project programme.

The Bureau, however, is used to leadership. For many years, it pub-

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lished the only comprehensive set of municipal statistics for Canada, until the job was taken over by the provinces. Its assessment and expropriation study caused such a stir that the Ontario Law Reform Committee reviewing expropriation policies accepted a copy in the form of a brief after the normal cut off date for the submission of briefs.

"To continue to do the job that ought to be done for a city this size," says Hurst, "we would like to see our expenditure raised by half as much again—\$25,000." But money is not really the limiting factor. The Bureau is finding it difficult to compete with the Federal and provincial governments in attracting young graduates, who tend to see only the glamour and prestige of research at the central government level. Against major issues of fiscal and monetary policy, says Hurst, "sewage and transportation don't have quite the same attraction."

## A difficult refusal

Like some businessmen, perhaps, the graduates fail to realize the bulk of urban expenditures at the local government level—\$4.5 billion, or 28% of total government expenditures, in fact. The biggest business in Toronto is its municipalities: having raised well over \$1200 million in bonds since Metro's inception, they spend annually more than eight out of ten provinces.

Belatedly, government departments are beginning to recognize the importance of municipal problems. The Ontario government has just beefed up its municipal research division (and is currently engaged in staffing it in direct competition with the Bureau), but up to now, research in public administration has tended to bypass municipal problems in favour of provincial or Federal ones, even though the size of Toronto's local expenditures—presently over \$500 million annually—warranted an equivalent amount of attention. It is this gap that the Bureau was originally formed to fill: since business pays nearly half of local taxes, it has a sizeable stake in even a 1% saving—which would repay it \$2 million at current levels. Also, as the Bureau sees it, industry and commerce "need a reasoned and expert voice such as the Bureau provides to counterbalance their lack of votes at the polls."

The voice is not, however, one that

speaks for business. Hurst takes pains to emphasize the objective nature of the Bureau's research. "We are completely independent," he says. "No position we take on an issue is generated by the fact we represent a sectional interest. We take the broad view that business is helped by the strength of the community, to which we can contribute by making our unbiased findings available to officials and politicians."

Since the influence of the Bureau is enhanced by its reputation for objective research, it goes to some lengths to keep it unsullied. The maximum subscription is a \$1000 "sustaining" membership, unlike some American counterparts where one or two industries pay so much of their costs that they may have an opportunity to affect the outcome of research. Similarly, the Bureau recently turned down a proposal for the addition of a function within the Bureau that would have been publicly financed.

As the amount involved was \$25,000 it was "a difficult decision to make," says Hurst. "Though it offered a solution to our financial problems, there was no way to take advantage of it without compromising our reputation for unbiased research." Additional money will have to come from business, though the only direct service rendered by the Bureau to members is the supply of information on civic affairs to help in their dealings with municipal authorities—the equivalent of experts on staff.

## The coming land squeeze

Judging from the list of enquiries received by the Bureau, however, not only is this service valued by members but there is plenty of room for additional Canadian Bureaus in other cities. Recent queries include a request for a residential assessment study from Burnaby, BC, and for an analysis of Calgary's revenue-expenditure pattern from that city's Treasurer. Although many of the Bureau's equivalents in the US are taxpayers' associations with a sharp axe to grind (against public spending), the majority are financed by business and their greater number indicates higher awareness of the usefulness of this type of organisation there.

The value of the Bureau will become increasingly apparent to Toronto businessmen as the urbanisation of Toronto advances in the next few years, when its assistance will increasingly be needed both directly and indirectly by business. Some of the pressures that will act on business are foreseen by Dominic DelGuidice,

the director of the Bureau.

"We do not play the numbers game here at the Bureau," he says, "but I would say that the population of Metropolitan Toronto will probably be over 3 million in ten years—well over the 2.7 million that the planning board estimates as a maximum under existing density regulations, which will have to be revised. Urbanisation itself is a great consumer of land, since it means a larger share for public utilities and government. Since we don't have the capacity of the Dutch for manufacturing land by reclaiming it, competition for the relatively fixed supply in Toronto must increase precipitously."

## Faced with controls

DelGuidice predicts that industry will have to be more efficient in the use of land, though "it is going in the opposite direction at the moment. The vertical loft concept—different stages of manufacture of a product on separate floors of one building—no longer exists, but must return in the future. In the meantime, industry is moving out from the centre of the city to campus type, industrial parks, and the centre is being taken over for public purposes. The downtown area is becoming the exclusive preserve of banks, insurance companies, administration and other service industries, and those like the printing trades which require intimate and daily contact with their customers to survive."

While the Metro Toronto Planning Board will find it difficult to maintain the urban development boundary and will move it northwards to some extent, public sector competition for land, and the desire to curb speculation will lead as in Scandinavia, Britain and Germany to pressures for public control, DelGuidice thinks. "Before the year 2000 our present system of private ownership could be a casualty. The government may be forced to assume title to land, and lease some of it back to private developers." At the minimum, greater control will be asserted through stronger subdivision regulation, and negative zoning restrictions will be replaced by positively directed development in approved categories.

The business community, he says, will have to face up to these controls, realize it is public investments that create most land values, understand that decisions in the public sector are not as clear cut as business decisions, and that public servants are as capable, hardworking and dedicated as those in the private sector.

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