

SUPPORT THE **I VOTE TORONTO** CAMPAIGN

Thursday, July 2, 2009

I VOTE TORONTO is a community campaign that seeks to extend municipal voting rights to all permanent residents living in Toronto. The coalition consists of community centres, settlement and integration services, social justice groups, employment agencies, environmental organizations and concerned residents from all areas of Toronto.

Granting residents who are not citizens the right to vote is not a new idea. Jurisdictions in over 30 countries, including the United States, Great Britain, Argentina, Australia, The Netherlands and Israel allow non-citizens to vote at the local level.

In Ontario, 130,000 students have parents who cannot even vote for their school board trustee. Many of these students are concentrated in the same schools and neighbourhoods. This leaves entire schools and geographic areas without a local voice.

Property owners (and their spouses) still have more rights than residents. A property owner can vote in any municipality in which he or she owns property. This means someone with a property in various GTA municipalities can vote for Mayors, Councillors and trustees in all of those municipal elections, even though they do not reside in all of them. On the other hand, many residents who pay municipal taxes, use local services and have a stake in the community have no voice.

Low voting neighbourhoods are disproportionately located in the North York, York and Scarborough areas of Toronto. Between 1991 and 2001 the Toronto area alone attracted 43% of all immigrants to Canada in this period.

Allowing permanent residents to vote would level the playing field between non-resident property owners and non-citizen city residents. Ensuring that everyone who has made Toronto their permanent home will have the opportunity to express their voices through a vote will contribute to making local government more democratic and more accountable to its residents.

The Executive recommends:

Labour Council endorse the **I Vote Toronto** Campaign, and urge City Council and the Provincial Government to amend legislation so that all permanent residents have the right to vote in municipal elections.