

**EXECUTIVE BOARD STATEMENT TO THE
TORONTO & YORK REGION LABOUR COUNCIL
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING
THURSDAY, JUNE 2, 2005**



“THE ELITES AIM TO RESTRICT DEMOCRACY”

The City of Toronto Act should enhance both accountability and the quality of life in all our communities.

The political and economic elites of Toronto are determined to use the upcoming City of Toronto Act to shape the way decisions are made in Canada's largest city. This city is changing, both demographically and politically, and they clearly want to stay in control.

The Toronto Star and Board of Trade are pushing an agenda they call a strong mayor system, but closer examination shows it to be something quite different. Their proposal centres around a super-executive that will operate behind closed doors, effectively marginalizing the majority of City Councillors elected by their local constituents. The provincial Liberals are threatening to impose a new form of governance with the City of Toronto Act, and given their stance on workers rights and privatization, there is reason to be concerned about their ultimate goals.

Much of the public commentary on this issue has come from planners and academics who suggest that broad powers should be concentrated in the hands of a few wise individuals. Their analysis rests on the belief that urban planning, waterfront development and building design are the most essential aspects of what our city does. But that is only a small fraction of the city's mandate. Much more important is what services does it undertake to ensure a decent quality of life for all residents.

One quarter of the municipal budget is spent on police where people want not only safe neighbourhoods but also a police force that is accountable. Other huge line items are fire and ambulance, shelter and housing, social services, and transit. Then comes waste management, roads and parks/recreation. Dozens of other services and programs are provided that are vital to healthy neighbourhoods and a decent quality of life. These are the issues which should be used to measure the powers and structure we want for Canada's largest urban center.

In fact, a hard-nosed evaluation would show that a vibrant arts and film sector has far greater economic and social benefit than the quality of downtown architecture. Labour Council has identified the urgent need to raise the income standards of one million workers in this region. Good planning and design is important, but can't be the driving force that overshadows the ability to democratically chart our overall future as a society.

With the visit of Mayor Daley of Chicago, the papers were full of praise for his record as a strong mayor. While there are things to learn from Chicago and other vibrant U.S. cities, we should be cautious about what ideas are imported from a political culture that has so many flaws as well as successes. Chief Fantino, a pillar of the Harris regime, exhibited all the forceful traits that the corporate elite admires, but wanted only to be accountable to himself. It will take years to undo the negative impact of his policies and restore a credible practice of community policing.

Labour Council has partnered with the Social Planning Council and Toronto Environmental Alliance to champion a different view - one that asserts that democracy at City Hall is a crucial foundation for a decent city. Not just to safeguard against corruption, but to ensure that people have champions who can influence policy ranging from quality of air we breathe to whether kids have a place to play in the outer suburbs. And most importantly, to ensure that the basics of strong, accessible and publicly delivered services are available to all of us regardless of income or social standing.

The Labour Council Executive recommends that we re-affirm our support for a new deal for cities that provides:

- a) A **foundation** of strong public services, publicly delivered and fully accountable to the residents of each community
- b) A **framework** of democratic governance that enhances accountability and engagement of all residents of each community
- c) A **reliable source** of revenues for the city government, transit authorities and local school boards
- d) A **practice** of planning and decision-making that results in environmental sustainability in all aspects of both public sector and private sector activity
- e) A **commitment** to the integrity of decent jobs with fair wages in every sector of the economy
- f) A **goal** of social and economic equity that ensures the prosperity of our cities is shared by all

The Labour Council Executive also recommends that we call on people and organizations from all walks of life to support the position paper jointly authored by TEA, CSPC and Labour Council demanding that the new City of Toronto Act provide:

- 1) The power to build the City that Torontonians want
- 2) The resources to do the job
- 3) The City government be accountable to all people and communities