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The mayor tightens his grip

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By Roys on James City Columnist

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The resignation of Toronto's top bureaucrat, Shirley Hoy, yesterday touched off many stories of hard work, integrity and unshakeable belief in the public service.

On any given weekday morning, Hoy is already crossing Nathan Phillips Square into city hall by 6:30 for another routine 12-hour day. The rank and file notice:

"I see her – the alpha dog in the organization – and I say to myself, 'Stop feeling sorry for yourself and get your ass in to work.' I mean, if she's here this early, so can you," said one staffer yesterday. "We're losing a role model, a rock."

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But Hoy's resignation signals another loss: the productive era of civil servants as independent professionals.

Get ready for the city manager as yes-man, city staff as an extension of the mayor's office and, sadly, the politicization of the civil service.

In fact, some say the new reality is already here and that Hoy, 57, failed to beat back the forces, even if she did not embrace them. Even as she leaves, the mayor still covets the power to unilaterally hire and fire the city manager.

The mayor's quest for powers he effectively has confuses most observers. Before city councillors knew that Hoy was leaving, the mayor already had lined up her replacement. Both

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announcements came yesterday. All that's left is council's rubber stamp.

By law, council can revolt against his pick, though it is the most rare circumstance that would yield such a result. But enshrine the right, and suddenly all pretense is removed. The city manager becomes beholden to the mayor only – his attack dog and lap dog.

To state this is not to comment on Hoy's replacement, Joe Pennachetti, the competent chief financial officer whom Mayor David Miller has hand picked without even looking outside the organization. Joe P. knows municipal government, having worked for York, Peel and Durham regions before joining Toronto.

He and Hoy ("We've been like twins," Hoy says) are cut from the same municipal cloth, where staff give council professional advice and council makes the political decision. Both live by the code but are not the type who will go to lengths to fight off the forces of politicization of staff. Hoy, in quiet, stubborn ways, because of her years of service at the city, and her history and standing at city hall, was better positioned to stand up to the mayor and his staff. Joe P. is more exposed. And by the time he's gone, we should be fully into the era of total mayoral control.

Despite denials yesterday, rumours persisted for months that she was frustrated with the mayor's autocratic style. They locked horns over some personnel decisions. Hoy was said to stand up for Brenda Librecz when the mayor wanted her canned as head of parks and recreation. Librecz has jumped to Markham.

In leaving, Hoy said she believes the city manager should not be a cheerleader for the mayor.

"You're not the chief of staff in the mayor's office," whose job is to make the mayor look good. "Your focus is to ensure the public service does its job. You don't see me and the mayor travelling together much. There has to be a real clarity of roles. You can't have someone with a big ego in this job."

Oh, yes you can. And while it won't be Joe P., because he avoids the spotlight as studiously as a stage hand, anticipate the day soon when the city manager and mayor walk in lockstep, linked in politics and policy.

Some can't wait. Others view Hoy's departure as a marker.

Royson James usually appears Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

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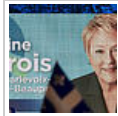
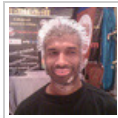

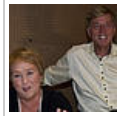
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