

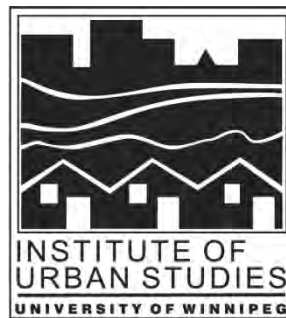
# Local Government Reform

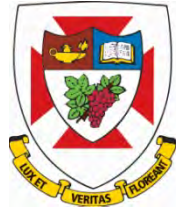
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1976

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The Institute of Urban Studies





THE UNIVERSITY OF  
WINNIPEG

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**LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM**

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

[Lloyd Axworthy]

Institute of Urban Studies

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## INTRODUCTION

Winnipeg is a city deserving careful scrutiny by those interested in the reform of local government. At the beginning of the 1960's, Winnipeg was reorganized by the Provincial Government of Manitoba into a Metropolitan two-tier style of government, similar in operation to that of Toronto. In 1972, the Province established a new form of regional government for the Winnipeg area and added a few new wrinkles for enlisting greater citizen participation at the local level. These different efforts at institutional engineering make Winnipeg's experience useful for analysing the impact of different structural changes in local government. In particular, it provides instructive material for testing a number of propositions about the relevance of institutional reform as a form of solution to the ills of present day urban communities.

This essay will concentrate primarily on the question of how the government changes in Winnipeg have helped meet the need for better planning and management and for more democratic practices at the local level. It will not be able to cover all the material, nor does it pretend to be a conclusive assessment, as the changes are of recent vintage. But, it will seek to draw from the Winnipeg case pertinent evidence on the matter of institutional reform.<sup>1</sup>

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1. The material is drawn from a more extensive study undertaken by the Institute of Urban Studies at the University of Winnipeg, published in the spring of 1974, although some new data has been added. See Lloyd Axworthy, James Cassidy, Unicity: The Transition, Institute of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg, 1974.

## BACKGROUND

Winnipeg is a city of just over half a million people. It is the dominant urban center in Manitoba, with approximately half the population of the province. The greater part of all of the goods and services produced in the province are generated in the Winnipeg area and it provides most of the jobs and produces most of the tax revenues needed to run the province.<sup>2</sup> It has had a very stable economy, historically tied to its role as an entrepôt for the agricultural hinterland. But increasingly it is a mixed enterprise economy with growing commercial and service enterprises, insuring against major fluctuations in employment.<sup>3</sup>

The city has, over the years, been transformed by successive waves of European immigration until it is now one of the most cosmopolitan areas in Canada -- and one of the few in which Anglo-Saxons are in a minority.<sup>4</sup> Governed throughout its history by representatives of the Anglo-Saxon business elite, within the last two decades the ethnic majority has been making its political power felt.

Historically, there has been an underlying socio-political consensus shaping the city's political environment. This consensus about the main principles and directions of urban politics is

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2. Government of Manitoba, "Proposals for Urban Reorganization in the Greater Winnipeg Area", December 1970, p. 2. 2.

3. Metropolitan Corporation of Greater Winnipeg, The Place of Greater Winnipeg in the Economy of Manitoba, 1971.

4. Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1971 Census.

Inherited from the business oriented Anglo-Saxons who were firm believers in "good government", "efficiency" and "business principles". This was translated into strong feelings about keeping politics out of local government, and operating local government according to sound no-nonsense administrative procedures. The representatives from ethnic groups, primarily Ukrainian, German and Jewish, which have taken over these political posts seem to have an even stronger belief in these principles of non-partisanship, efficiency and conservatism.

While a breakdown is beginning to appear in this view of local government, in Toronto and Vancouver, it is still a dominant feature in Winnipeg. In part, this can be attributed to Winnipeg's slow growth. The population increase in Winnipeg from 1966 to 1970 was only 5% as compared to 16% in Toronto, 15% in Vancouver, 16% in Edmonton, and 21% in Calgary.<sup>5</sup> Thus, while Winnipeg's heterogeneity in population would seem to indicate the development of a more divergent set of political values, the slow growth has protected until just recently, the continuation of a more stable traditional outlook. In part it might also be attributed to the fact that Winnipeg's working class are also generally small property owners, carrying with them concerns about necessary basic services at low cost. As well, the principal media in Winnipeg, particularly the Winnipeg Free Press have been very conservative in approach and enthusiastic boosters of civic "good government".

Whatever the

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5. See the Globe and Mail, Toronto, November 9 1971.

reasons, Winnipeg has been a city where local government has been characterized by its lack of involvement in programs of social reform, the support of civic good works and an overriding concern with keeping taxes low.<sup>6</sup>

Beginning in the 1970's however, Winnipeg began to feel the same kind of pressures for development and change that are generally part of the urban scene elsewhere in the country. Differences over downtown renewal, transportation systems, suburban land development and the provision of public housing emerged as major issues in Winnipeg as it moved into the 1970's. In addition, there is the particularly striking problem of substantial in-migration of Native people from rural areas, so that it is estimated that there are over 30,000 urban Native people residing in the core of the City, most of whom are on the lowest income scale.<sup>7</sup>

These developments have had the impact of creating highly politicized issues and engendering growing cleavages over issues. Thus, just at the time when a new organization of local government was being introduced, the political, social and economic environment of the city was shifting and new political forces were coming into play. One of the important questions this juxtaposition of change in the political environment and change in the local government raises is how and to what degree the new institutions acted

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6. Winnipeg has a rate of 60% single family home ownership. For a discussion of how population characteristics, including property ownership influence political behavior and policy outcomes, see: Edmund P. Fowler, Robert Lineberry, "The Comparative Analysis of Urban Policy: Canada and the United States", Harlan Hahn, ed., People and Politics in Urban Society, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, 1972.
  7. Don McCaskill, "Migration, Adjustment, and Integration of the Indian into the Urban Environment", unpublished Masters Thesis, Carlton University, 1970.

upon the political process. Did the new institutions open channels for the expression of new political forces or did it consolidate the hold of the conservative, business oriented, political groups? Was the city able to plan and initiate innovative programs in response to changing conditions in its downtown core, or to meet problems posed by urban growth? These become, in part, the real tests for measuring the effectiveness of changes in Winnipeg's form of government.

#### 1960: THE METROPOLITAN CORPORATION OF GREATER WINNIPEG

In 1960 the Provincial Government introduced a two-tier Metropolitan form of government.<sup>8</sup> The division of powers between the separate municipalities and the Metropolitan Corporation was similar to the metro scheme in Toronto. It was given full authority over all planning, zoning and issuing of building permits; charged with responsibility of preparing a master plan that included long term planning for major roads, bridges, transit, sewer, water, garbage, and major parks. In addition, Metro had operational responsibility for public transit, mosquito abatement, flood protection, sewage disposal, assessment, and water supply, (excluding local distribution).

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8. Up to 1960 the urban region of Winnipeg had been divided into government between a central City of Winnipeg and a group of surrounding municipalities, along with a number of regional boards and commissions looking after water supply and public transit. For discussion of the situation pre-Metro, and an expanded history of the Metro years, see: George Rich, "Metropolitan Winnipeg: The First Ten Years" in Ralph Krueger and Charles Bryfogle, eds., Urban Problems, Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971, p. 359.



Unlike Toronto, the political representation on Winnipeg's Metro Council was not drawn from elected representatives of the respective municipalities. Instead, the city was divided into ten pie-wedged constituencies, each electing a separate councillor. This created a critical separation between the individual political jurisdictions, and the metro level, and enabled the politicians in the respective municipalities to evade all responsibility for the Metro operation.

In fact, the history of the ten year operation of Metro is one of unending disagreement between the City of Winnipeg led by Mayor Stephen Juba and the Metro Corporation. Many nasty words were exchanged and more seriously, many needed programs were stymied, particularly in sensitive areas such as the planning of the downtown and new transportation programs. Metro became a convenient political whipping boy for the City of Winnipeg and the Municipalities. If taxes went up or services weren't delivered, it was Metro's fault.

Metro, however, did have some achievements to its credit. It created area-wide uniform assessments, added a substantial amount of park space, built several major bridges and considerably improved the water-sewage treatment system of the city. These were all functions entirely within the purview of Metro. In critical areas, such as planning and development, <sup>however</sup> it was a different story.

In the mid-1960's the Conservative provincial administration appointed a blue-ribbon Boundaries Commission which, among other things, was charged with recommending changes in Winnipeg's Metro structure. By the end of the decade, the Commission was about ready

to advise on a reorganization of Winnipeg, maintaining the two-tier structure, but redefining its powers and form of political representation.

Before the Commission could report, however, a provincial election was held and the New Democratic Party under Edward Schreyer, took over. One of Schreyer's campaign commitments had been a pledge to set up some form of regional government. But, he was not going to trust a Tory-appointed Commission to give him advice. Instead, a group of Toronto-based consultants were brought in and in very short order - a matter of about one year - a very different kind of local government scheme for Winnipeg was proposed.

#### PROPOSALS FOR REFORM

In December, 1973, the Provincial Government produced a White Paper outlining its plans for the reorganization of Winnipeg, a concept that quickly became labelled UNICITY.

In the White Paper the Provincial Government proposed the complete amalgamation of all the municipalities. As a first step the mill rates of the city were to be equalized. The other services of the city such as police and fire protection would be amalgamated over a transitional period.

To govern Unicity, the White Paper proposed a 48-member central council, elected from single member wards, with an electoral base of 10,000 population. Implicit in this proposal for a very small ward representative system was the notion that this would bring about a closer relationship between citizen and elected members. The Mayor was to be elected by a majority of Council members. This was a major departure from the long-standing practice

in the city of direct election by the populace at large and was interpreted as an effort by the provincial government to create a form of parliamentary government on the local level.<sup>10</sup>

The Council would be organized on the basis of standing committees dealing with finance, public works and environment. Over the committees was to be a central Executive-Policy Committee composed of the Mayor and other Committee Chairmen. It was to be the policy-making, coordinating arm of Council, acting in effect like a Cabinet. The administrative arrangements paralleled this Cabinet-style executive structure. There were to be three commissioners for each of the committees and a Chief Commissioner as overall executive officer. All the Commissioners were gathered together in their own executive group or a Board of Commissioners to act as the staff arm to the Executive Policy Committee. The organizing principle underlying this executive policy making apparatus was the selection of the mayor by a majority on council. This was to be the Parliamentary link that would insure the maintenance of a majority position for setting policy and programs.

Thus far, the thrust of the new proposals was the creation of an efficient centralized system, eliminating the fragmentation and separation of the former metro arrangement. It was a clear case of trying to achieve cohesiveness and effectiveness in local organizational planning and policy making that operates in most urban areas.

In company with this centralizing, amalgamative arrangement, was a series of proposals designed to decentralize the political system and give the citizen greater access to government. To achieve

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10. For a collection of views on the meaning of the White Paper proposals, see Lloyd Axworthy ed. The Future City, Institute of Urban Studies, 1971.

This, the White Paper proposed the City be divided into thirteen community committee areas composed of between three to four wards that were contained approximately within the boundaries of the old suburban municipalities, and within traditional neighbourhood designations within the old city of Winnipeg.

The Community Committees were to localize access by the citizen to local government. They had the power to supervise local administrative functions such as the running of local parks, playgrounds, and libraries. They considered applications for zoning variances or development plans. They were to advise the central council on the needs of the local area. Tied in with the Community Committees was another innovation called Resident Advisory Groups (RAGS). Resident Advisors were to be elected each year by private citizens in each of the Community Committee areas, and were to meet at least monthly with the Community Committee on issues of interest and importance to the local area.

The combination of proposals were seen as providing answers to two of the most troublesome issues facing most urban areas: overcoming a fragmentation in jurisdiction with its attendant inefficiencies; and developing means of having the ordinary citizen more effectively involved in the affairs of local government. It is this particular combination of goals that makes the Winnipeg system somewhat unique. While some urban areas have had regional forms of government, and others have experimented with techniques for decentralizing the political system, the proposals for Winnipeg were designed to achieve both these goals with one integrated system.

Implicit in these proposals was the assumption that the performance of local government could be improved and more participation of citizens achieved through new institutional arrangements.

#### BILL 36

After a six month period of public hearings and legislative debate the basic outline presented in the White Paper was adopted, with one major change and a few minor modifications. The major change in Bill 36 was a reversion back to direct election of the mayor. This undoubtedly was in accord with the feelings of most Winnipeg citizens.<sup>11</sup> It could also be attributable to the influence of Steve Juba the Mayor of Winnipeg, who probably concluded that he would not be mayor if he were to rely on a vote of majority of councillors. Provincial government officials deny any deal with the Mayor, but his strong following with the Winnipeg electorate would make him a powerful enemy in any provincial election if he were not given the Mayor's job. Whatever the reason, the change in the form of mayoralty election had a strong disruptive effect on the neatly laid out formula for strong executive leadership under the Parliamentary model. With the mayor freed from the necessity to command majority support, the imperative to develop cohesive working coalitions based on identifiable policy thrusts/ <sup>was lost.</sup> Other, more limited modifications included a change from a 48 member to a 50 member council, changes in the number of members of the Council Committees and an increase in the base salary of the members.

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11. For an amplification of survey results see Axworthy, Cassidy op. cit.

The final version of the act also included a number of new provisions emphasizing a more sophisticated role for the city in matters of planning and environmental control. One was the requirement for each community committee area to establish a district area plan, detailing guidelines for growth in each area, based on some assessment of resident needs. A second provision was the requirement that the City undertake environmental impact studies on all major developments. This reflects an apparent interest by the provincial government in shifting local government priorities to a more comprehensive role in planning and development, a trend that can also be seen in the Ontario regional government schemes. Again, it ~~was~~ an effort to change performance and policy by changing the legal and institutional framework.

With Bill 36 passed during the summer, the Provincial Government selected October 6th, 1971 as election day for the new Council, with the new system officially to begin operation on January 1st, 1972. This hasty introduction of the new system was certainly ill-advised, compared to other local government reform procedures which seem to extend a lengthier transition period in order for administrators and politicians to ease into their jobs.<sup>12</sup> In Winnipeg, however, it was a case of a crash introduction to the new system, whatever the consequences.

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12. For example, in Britain orientation periods of two to three years were set aside for councillors and administrators to develop an understanding of reform structure and organize transitional techniques. See Joyce Land, Alan Norton, Setting Up New Authorities, Charles Night and Co., London, 1972.

## POLITICAL RESULTS

Various authors have analysed how different institutional arrangements affect the politics of a city. For example, Robert Lineberry and Edmond Fowler suggest that cities which have ward constituencies, partisan elections, mayor council governments maximize representation of minority groups and provide greater access by citizens to decision makers.<sup>13</sup> Charles Gilbert and Christopher Clague have shown that non-partisan elections, and large district elections favour incumbency and lessen the chance of political responsiveness to citizen demands for change.<sup>14</sup> Depending on what form the change takes, some political advantages are given to some groups, and disadvantages to others.

What, then, has been the effect of reorganization on the politics of Winnipeg? The first election conducted in early November, 1972 saw the dominance of two major political forces. First was the overwhelming victory of the Independent Civic Election Committee, who gained 37 out of the 50 seats. The I.C.E.C. is a nominally non-partisan election group, bringing together non-socialist, political groups who in provincial or federal politics would be Conservatives or Liberals. This tradition of a so-called non-partisan group goes back as far as 1919. In 1972 it gained added strength because of the fears of the business community caused by the N.D.P. provincial election victory in 1969. For the new city elections therefore a good deal of money was raised and a strong organizational

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13. Robert Lineberry, Edmond Fowler, "Reformism and Public Policies in American Cities", Charles Bonjean, et. al. Community Politics, Free Press, New York, 1971.
14. Charles Gilbert, Christopher Clague, "Electoral Competition and Election Systems in Large Cities", Journal of Politics 24, May 1962 pp. 323 - 340.

effort was made. The N.D.P. which had made a strong showing in Winnipeg during the provincial election, managed to elect only seven. Independents won in five wards, the communists in one.

In the second civic election held in 1974 the I.C.E.C. lost eight seats, the N.D.P. picked up two seats, Independents increased to eight and a new grouping called the Civic Reform Coalition picked up one. The Civic Reform group running on a civic reform, anti-development platform, overall garnered 25% of the total vote, and on the basis of this showing promised to renew and double their efforts in future years.

Their chance of success in capturing City Hall at this stage, however, is doubtful. One major reason is traceable to the impact of government reorganization. In the first place amalgamation reinforced the position and power of the suburban property owning constituency represented by the I.C.E.C. Their interest in local government is not innovation and social reform, but adequate delivery of services and low taxes. They are the predominant electoral force in the suburbs, but are also strong in the older, working class, ethnic areas of the city. So, voters who vote N.D.P. provincially are obviously voting I.C.E.C. on the local level because of a different set of interests. While there are those who contend that the real source of power in city politics is the property-development industry,<sup>15</sup> the importance of this determinant political constituency in a city should not be overlooked. Through amalgamation the dominance of this constituency was assured.

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15. See James Lorimer, The Real World of City Politics. James, Lewis, and Samuels, Toronto 1972.



One could postulate for example, that if the boundaries separating the former old City of Winnipeg from suburban municipalities had been retained, and had the downtown area become more populated with high rise residents, older people, native people, that the prospect of reform urban populist type councillors coming to dominate council at least in the jurisdiction of the central city would have increased - perhaps duplicating the situation in Toronto. As it is, however, the I.C.E.C. majority on Council is heavily dominated by suburban members and they control committee appointments and have the edge in voting strength.<sup>16</sup> In fact one inner city councillor elected under the I.C.E.C. banner resigned from caucus over the issue of suburban domination. The manner in which the

this suburban control affects the performance of city government in Winnipeg is noted by one city hall reporter: "Suburban councillors generally want new residential development in their areas, major commercial development in the downtown area and an efficient transportation system, private or public, connecting the two centers of activity. Their interests are in direct conflict to Inner City Councillors who see protection of established neighbourhoods and redevelopment of deteriorated areas as prime concerns".<sup>17</sup>

The reorganization then has had its influence on the priorities of the city and the policies it has adopted. In contrast to other Canadian cities which are showing signs of some concern over the environmental damage caused by major development projects,

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16. Eight out of the ten members of the Executive Policy Committee are from the suburbs.

17. Robert Matas, "Ghost of Metro Lingers on Council", Winnipeg Tribune, November 9, 1974.

Winnipeg City Council has provided support and subsidization of large scale development, premised on the need for generating further tax revenue. There has also been a noticeable lack of attention paid to matters of low cost housing, inner city renewal and a disregard for economic or social development policies that would meet the needs of native people who have migrated to the central city.

Preliminary breakdown of budget figures show expenditure on matters such as recreation, capital works and maintenance being disproportionately allocated to suburban areas. While in part this might be explained in terms of the suburban growth in population requiring heavier investment in public works, it doesn't account for the neglect that is evidenced for the needs of the older parts of Winnipeg. So, it can be concluded at least in the early stage reorganization generally has influenced a choice of civic priorities towards issues of importance to suburban voters and against those of the inner city.

The reorganization of government also had a limited effect in changing the style of mayoralty politics. The incumbent mayor throughout his career has been a flamboyant, non-issue style of leader, relying on showmanship and an appeal to the ethnic vote. His performance in the two elections under the new system was no different as they were characterized by a lack of any debate or discussion. If the original notion of council election of the mayor had been retained then this might have changed. The I.C.E.C. and N.D.P. would have had to run mayoralty candidates and put forward some kind of common platform. This then might have carried

over into the development of a general policy thrust by Council which could have been more easily identified by voters, thus increasing the degree of accountability of the system. As it now stands, executive leadership is weak, with very little central aim or thrust.

Finally, the new system while specially designed to encourage increased electoral participation by citizens and minority representation through the small ward system has been no more successful than other local governments.<sup>18</sup> At first it appeared that progress had been made. The first election had a 60% turnout. But, it must be remembered that this was in part due to the novelty of the new system and the relatively strong anti-NDP feeling in the suburbs. In the second election, turnout fell to 35%, about the level under former municipal schemes, proving again that the general rate of involvement in local politics is low, because the saliency of issues is low.<sup>19</sup> People vote when there is a competition of people or issues. The reorganization of local government, at least in Winnipeg, has had limited effect in inducing such competition. In fact the 1974 election saw ten council seats filled by acclamation. While there are many suggestions on how to increase voter awareness in municipal elections, it appears

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18. Some individual instances of minority representation did occur. In the first election the director of the Indian-Metis Friendship Center was elected in a downtown ward. He declined to run for a second term but his seat was won by a representative of the Chinese community.

19. Sydney Verba, Norman H. Nie, Participation in America, Harper and Row, New York, 1972.

that the particular design of the Winnipeg system is not one of them. But, to be fair the turnout in civic elections held in supposedly reform minded cities such as Toronto and Vancouver was no better!

From these early soundings then, the difficulty of effecting change in the political direction of the city can be seen. The ambition of the provincial government to have the city focus on inner city issues, show greater sensitivity to environmental issues, take bolder planning initiatives, has not emerged because the previous political consensus is unchanged. If anything, the suburbs enjoy more advantages than they did under the old system as they now control the total city government.

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### ADMINISTRATIVE PERFORMANCE

Of all the objectives put forward as a reason for local government reform, effective administration and overcoming fragmentation in services and planning are the ones most widely accepted. This was certainly the case for Winnipeg. The Government White Paper proposals were designed to overcome the duplication, inefficiencies and stalemate that had characterized local government during the Metro decade.

The results of the reorganization have been mixed. On the plus side the equalization of mill rates immediately brought greater equity in the fiscal system of the city. Formerly wealthy suburbs had relatively low mill rates because they could utilize services provided by the central city. In 1972 this came to an end and they had to pay their fair share. To give example the suburb of Tuxedo, a very high income area had its mill rates go up by 40% compared to only a minor increase for the Central city.

In other areas the results are less clear. The general assessment by politicians, administrators and citizens alike is that the delivery of basic services has neither declined or improved, although there are some complaints from residents of former suburban areas that services such as road repair or snow clearance are not as efficient.<sup>20</sup>

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20. This is based on a series of interviews with public officials and a survey of the populace. A more comprehensive assessment of administrative performance of the new system is difficult to achieve at such an early stage, although work has now begun by the author in analysing budget changes. See Axworthy, Cassidy, *op. cit.*, p. 38, 39.

At the same time critics of the new system were right when they claimed that the costs of amalgamation would be high. Even taking into account the normal annual increase in costs and the necessary start-up costs of a new system, city officials have admitted that bringing services up to common standard, will cost the city substantially more.<sup>21</sup> Time will only tell whether through amalgamation the general level of services will be improved.

One answer to that depends on whether a centralized administration of services necessarily leads to efficiencies. Evidence is being produced to show that this is not the case and that in only a few selected areas do economics of scale apply in the delivery of services.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the centralization of authority and decision-making can become the cause of delay in administration and lack of quick response to problems.

The unintended consequences flowing from a centralization of authority can be seen in the area of planning and development control in Winnipeg. A major complaint under the old system was the confusion and delay caused by having several jurisdictions responsible for matters of subdivision approval, zoning control, supply of new land services. What transpired since 1971 has made this old system look like a model of efficiency.

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21. In the Winnipeg Free Press, October 18, 1974, Chief Stewart stated that the cost for unifying the police force would be \$400,000.00.

22. See in particular, Robert Levine, Public Planner, Basic Book, New York, 1972 and David Roger, The Management of Big Cities, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, 1971.

The most serious trouble has been in housing. Bill 36 introduced a series of new requirements for approving subdivisions, deciding on zoning variations and gaining approval on development agreements. The purpose was to provide a greater degree of public protection through public hearings and administrative control. The end result was a process requiring ninety different procedural acts doubling the time for approval of sub-division applications and zoning variations.<sup>23</sup> This has led to a serious housing shortage and escalation in cost, at least accordance to the house building industry.<sup>24</sup> It demonstrates once again that problems arise from hasty implementation of government reform, without proper attention to possible consequences.

In the area of downtown development, however, the Act did achieve its goal of more effective decision making, albeit with questionable results. Prior to 1971 both the City of Winnipeg and the Metro Corporation had their respective plans for revitalizing the downtown core. Both plans were predicated on major commercial high rise development, but there was a stalemate in execution because of the political differences. Under the new unified system the pro-development forces from the old Metro Council, City Council and suburban councils work together, and have made a series of decisions in support of major downtown development projects. Many of these have been passed with little scrutiny, with one 100 million dollar project involving complicated land transfer from the city

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23. See "Building Sites: A Prime Component of Housing", a report prepared by Underwood McLellan for the Winnipeg Housebuilders' Association, 1973, 1973, p. 29.

24. Ibid., pp. 22-25.

being approved in a matter of four days from the time it was proposed by the developer.<sup>25</sup>

One little noticed section of the City of Winnipeg Act, however, is beginning to loom with increasing importance on matters of development. That is the requirement of environmental impact studies on major public works. Already this has had the result of slowing down or altering Council decisions on major projects, and in the future has the potential of being an effective check against damaging projects. For the first few years of operation under the new Act, administrators of the City didn't bother to apply the environmental impact requirements. But, now under pressure from citizen groups the environmental impact tool may be of increasing importance in development decisions.<sup>26</sup>

An area where the effect of the unified system has not yet had a chance to fully demonstrate its worth is in the matter of regional land use and transportation. In 1974 City Council did pass two major proposals. One was plans for major shopping center locations in the suburban areas. This occasioned a sharp conflict between suburban councillors who were for the plan and the Commissioner of Environment who originally tried to limit such development. In the second case the Council has passed some control on land use in the additional zone around Winnipeg, utilizing the technique of large lot zoning. Without commenting on the worth

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25. See Winnipeg Free Press, December 20, 1974, "City's Trizec Study takes a Beating".

26. See Lloyd Axworthy, Don Epstein, "Urban Populism", a paper presented to Canadian Studies Conference, Toronto, June, 1974.



of each decision, they would appear to have been achieved more readily under the unified system rather than under the old metro system.

In transportation planning, the network of expressway systems adopted by the old Metro Council (W.A.T.S.) have after increasing public opposition been rejected by the new council. Nothing new has been offered in replacement and it cannot be stated at this point in time whether the new system will in fact effect the implementation of a regional transportation network.

One issue that emerges from the recent effort at regional planning and development in Winnipeg is the problem of administrative accountability. Any governmental agency that takes the issue of accountability seriously must demonstrate that it meets the requirements of informing citizens, that there is an open procedure for receiving citizen complaints, that the agency makes its choices based on citizen preference. These requirements are not being met in the Winnipeg system, particularly as a result of the erosion or disappearance of local offices of public employees and an increasing concentration and centralization of staff.

A prime example of this occurred when the Board of Commissioners proposed and Council accepted a plan for establishing a system that divided the city into six districts for the purpose of administering city services. Such an arrangement is a direct contradiction of the Community Committee formula and clearly indicates that the chief administrators of the city are disregarding the intentions of the Act which sought to provide some degree of local control and supervision

over the delivery of services. It thus raises the question of just how well the goal of greater citizen contact and access to city government has been achieved.

#### CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Perhaps the most heralded aspect of the new government system in Winnipeg was the Community Committee - Resident Advisory system, designed to give local citizens close contact and access to city decision makers. According to the designers of the system, there would be a continuing institutional framework whereby private citizens could advise on matters affecting the local neighbourhood, and consult their councillors. The sections of the Act setting forward the powers and duties of the Community Committees and Resident Advisors were however, very general and vague, leaving many doubts on the exact role of these institutions.

Even with these limitations, the Resident Advisory Groups showed early signs that they might become an important part of local government. Over four hundred people were active in the initial thirteen resident advisory groups with membership ranging in each from about twenty to over two hundred in one. They organized themselves usually into committees corresponding to the committees on Council, i.e., works and operations, environment finance, and several undertook special tasks related to specific neighbourhood concerns. Most of the resident advisers were people who had been community activists previously and who now saw in the R.A.G.'s a

a new vehicle to pursue their concerns.<sup>27</sup>

Soon, however, it became apparent that the work of the Resident Advisors was seriously constrained by a lack of resources and support from either the City Administration or the Provincial Government. Very technical documents were referred to the R.A.G.s; many tasks of neighbourhood contact and communication were left to the volunteer citizen members by councillors, all without any significant staff or financial help.

This reflected the generally unenthusiastic attitude by most city councillors and administrators towards R.A.G.s. In a survey conducted among councillors, when asked if R.A.G.s should be given additional support, 50% said no, 34% said yes.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, there has never been any serious discussion on Council over the role of R.A.G.s or citizen involvement generally. It appears that they are viewed as apart from the normal governing process.

In part, this view is deserved. R.A.G. members themselves admit that they have not been very successful in communicating with their respective communities, nor in involving many citizens. As well, because the R.A.G.s tend often to be composed of citizen activists with a strong orientation toward issues they often find themselves talking about matters or taking stands that differ from the general population. As a result they become marked as a forum for the "troublemakers".<sup>29</sup> There is also a tendency for R.A.G.

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27. L. Axworthy, J. Cassidy, Unicity: The Transition, p. 117.

28. Ibid., p. 117.

29. For a discussion of the issue differences between citizen activists and general range of citizens see Verba and Nie, op. cit., chapter 5.

members to become cliquish and closed in their meetings, thus discouraging active participation of others.

Where there has been some additional outside resources available from university groups, private planning organizations or community development agencies, some very useful initiatives have been taken. In three inner city community committee areas the R.A.G.s have become sponsors of neighbourhood planning ventures which have involved residents in determining the planning options for their own area. In another case the R.A.G.s became the forum where serious public opposition was raised to a combined federal, provincial, municipal plan for railway relocation. A coalition of citizen groups and social agencies using research material from a university-based transportation economist opposed the plans and through a series of presentations in various community committee - resident advisory meetings were able to mount enough opposition to have the original proposals stopped and sent back for reworking by the consultants.

Those signs of vitality in the new neighbourhood structures are limited, however to a few areas of the city. In general the R.A.G.s are slowly declining in influence and involvement by citizens. In fact some councillors publicly have already called for an abolition of the system and many councillors and civic administrators privately see little use for the system.<sup>30</sup> Citizens are not aware of the existence of the R.A.G.s and make virtually no use of the

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30. See Robert Matas, "Citizen Role in Big City Government to be Scrapped", Winnipeg Tribune, November 16, 1972.

institutions. Without the means to reach out to more citizens or to deal on an equal basis in terms of expertise and information the participants in the Resident Advisory system are engaging in an increasingly irrelevant exercise.

Furthermore, because the R.A.G.s tend to deal with trivial matters, and because their actual influence on decision making is curtailed, the stakes of participation for most citizens are low. They see no direct or tangible benefit in investing limited resources of time and energy. So, only highly motivated activists who have a commitment to participation tend to become involved. The lesson this leaves is that if there are to be new institutions for citizen involvement they must be given some substantial power of decision making, not simply an "advisory" role as is the case in Winnipeg.

#### CONCLUSION

Local government reform in Winnipeg will continue to work its effects upon the city in a number of diverse ways, unfolding in patterns presently undetected. But, even at this early stage of the new system certain judgments on the usefulness of major overhaul in the institutional machinery of government can be made.

First, it is obvious that too much is expected of institutional reform. There has been a tendency, particularly noticeable amongst Canadian provincial governments to use local government reform as the placebo for urban ills. The assumptions by an older generation of political scientists that reorganizing local government will solve

problems of ineffective decision making, inefficient administration, lack of attention by the populace, have been put into practice by provincial governments in New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba. Furthermore, it is a neat way of having the provincial governments themselves avoid a more direct commitment of their money and resources to aiding urban ills. Tinkering with the machinery of local government seems preferable to undertaking major political action on land use, transportation, tax reform, and planning.

Yet, the case of Winnipeg shows convincingly that the result of reorganizing into a regional scheme has limited effect on the delivery of services and does not carry by itself the means of achieving good regional planning. In particular the time, effort and disruption caused by reorganization should be measured against the kind of limited improvements that ensue. A strategy of wholesale change in the system as carried out in Winnipeg may be less useful than specifying particular problem areas in the governmental structure and applying specific institutional corrections. Certainly the analysis of people such as Edward Banefield and James Wilson, by Scott Greer and the recent work done by the Institution for Operational Research in Great Britain suggests that effective regional planning can take place between different municipal jurisdictions without the necessity of new forms of regional government.<sup>31</sup>

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31. See Edward Banefield, James Q. Wilson, City Politics, Vintage Books, New York, 1966; J. K. Friend, J. M. Power, C. J. Yewlett, Public Planning: The Inter Corporate Dimension, Tavistock Publications, London, 1974; Norton Long, The Unwalled City, Basic Books, New York, 1972; and Scott Greer, The Urbane View, Oxford University Press, New York, 1972.

It is also important to realize that the impact local government reorganization has on a city are secondary to the impact of actions by senior levels of government. What the federal government decides in matters of housing legislation, airport location, tax incentives for industry, has a much greater impact on the economics and social health of an urban region than any local government reform. What the provincial government might do in the way of alleviating property tax burden, the kind of aid given for urban transportation, the land use controls on the urban periphery, the location of provincial offices and facilities affects city much more vitally than the imposition of a metro or a regional government scheme. Focusing therefore on local government reform can become a case of misplaced priorities.

This is not to suggest that institutional change should be ignored. It certainly has a role in the development of responses to urban conditions. It can, for example, have an impact on the division of political power within a city. While the basic social political forces are not changed by the institutional system, their form of expression is channeled by the institutions.

Strangely, little attention appears to have been paid by the designers of the Winnipeg system to the political outcome of their reform. The outline of the executive-administrative organs of government, the relationship between community committees and control council, the build-up of a strong centralist administrative system, were conceived with little anticipation of the political consequences.

Another area where little attention was paid, perhaps deliberately so, was the design of structures appropriate for dealing with the inter-governmental arrangements of the city. The importance of federal and provincial action on cities has already been registered. Yet few cities, Winnipeg included, have structures designed specifically for the task of dealing with senior levels of government, of relating to rural municipalities on the borders, or for undertaking many of the myriad functions that a city must perform in a complex intergovernmental system.

This reflects the point raised by Professor David Rodgers in his study of management of cities. He suggests that it is far more crucial to design specific new, innovative managerial techniques, new civil service practices and new political coalitions to meet new urban tasks, as opposed to worrying about regional government.<sup>32</sup> He also points to the need for developing effective forms of neighbourhood government or "parallel structures to city bureaucracies" as a way of making city government more responsive to change.

In fact, the area of citizen involvement may be where institutional reorganization has its most useful role. The lack of maximum and effective public pressure is often due to institutional impediments.<sup>33</sup> Much of the traditional political activity is seen by private citizens as meaningless. Government administration and

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32. David Rodgers, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-159.

33. See Harlan Hahn, "Reassessing and Revitalizing Urban Politics", in Harlan Hahn, ed., People and Politics In an Urban Society, Sage Publications, London, 1971.



planning is not responsive or accountable. It is difficult for the citizen to gain information on government programs. As a consequence, local government is out of touch and often unaccountable to the populace and this invariably leads to poor policy.

In Winnipeg, innovative steps were taken to overcome these problems. But, unfortunately, the good intentions of the Act were never carried through. The rights and duties of the community committees were poorly delineated. The Resident Advisory groups were not given any real assistance in the crucial first stage of their operation. Civic administrators, hostile to the idea of decentralization or any form of citizen control were allowed to establish administrative districts that run counter to community committee or resident advisory systems.

It shows that the provincial government was half-hearted in setting forth the goals of citizen involvement and didn't set forward an action program that would have provided the ways and means of developing a meaningful form of public participation. Such innovations as neighbourhood corporations or mini city halls using public powers, might have been introduced as valuable new adjuncts in community planning and redevelopment. The use of community information systems as a means of spreading and receiving information on urban problems and policies was not proposed or developed. There was not the establishment of urban resource centers that might have helped citizens to understand issues or initiate community self-help projects. Thus, the opportunity to establish new institutions in the City of Winnipeg was not taken and the

experiment of citizen involvement was really quite perfunctory.

The Winnipeg reorganization was old fashioned reform. It was primarily designed to overcome problems of fragmentation and of achieving some governmental unity in planning and administration. The fact is that the regional government is proving of questionable value in achieving these ends and of minimal value in tackling the increasingly serious contemporary problems of the city. It did not address problems of inter-governmental relations, of citizen activism, of social and economic development, of decentralizing authority and power, of the need for new managerial techniques and reorganization. While lip service was paid to such concerns in the original White Paper, the actual design of the new system was limited.

The Winnipeg case also shows that a shift of attention from local government to provincial and federal governments might be a more productive strategy in gaining solutions to urban problems. Local government is basically the provider of services. It does not have the scope nor the resources to tackle the critical issues of urban growth, urban planning, urban transportation, urban economic development, and urban social policy. These are matters for senior levels of government. Yet a great deal of energy is expended fussing over local government reform.

More might be achieved in constructing the concerns and priorities of urban citizens into Ottawa and provincial capitals. In fact if there is to be government reform, it might better occur on the senior levels of government. Provincial governments could use new institutional forms to order land use, to enable citizens to plan their communities, to have low income housing programs

that are initiated and managed by the occupants. The federal government should be working out ways of altering the immigration flows from the major urban centers and distributing economic activity more evenly across the country.

A careful look at the Winnipeg experience provides some useful lessons. First that local government reform is an overrated undertaking. And, secondly, when it is undertaken it should be aimed at goals very different from the traditional exercise of setting up a regional, centralized system. If such a lesson can be learned from the Winnipeg case, then it was a worthwhile experience.